

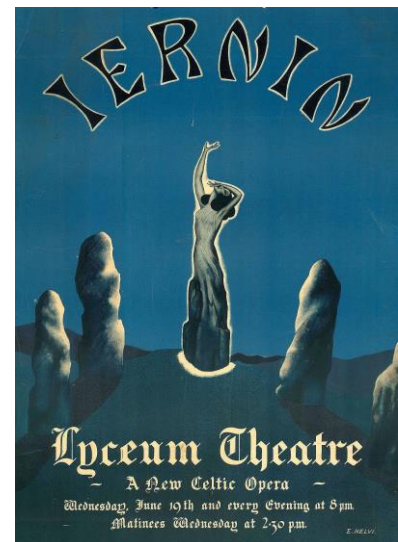
***lernin* – an opera. Origins and influences.**

**Transcript of a conversation with George Lloyd,
interviewed by Chris de Souza.**

March 1994

Chris de Souza (C De. S)

About Cornwall in the twenties or thirties, I always think about Betjeman's '*Summoned by Bells*' and his descriptions of going down to Cornwall on holiday and how he would go down on the Great Western Railway, and he would conjure up very specific images in my mind, and I would like to conjure up some of those now. You were on what was then really the Cornish Riviera... it was a real Riviera wasn't it?



George Lloyd (G. LL) Well, it was a sunnier period than now and that's *not* just because it was my childhood, I think that it a scientific fact that, well the Met. people will tell you that there was more sun at that period so I have all those colours very vividly in my mind. The colours of Cornwall I have meant an enormous amount to me and still do because I don't live there anymore and I visit it not as often as I would like, but I think that probably those colours which I saw without knowing what I was seeing that very very blue almost Mediterranean sky because our house was overlooking St. Ives Bay and you k now how beautiful it is...so you've got all that wonderful blue, the extraordinary luminosity of the area and then on the hills and the moors there was this wonderful gorse colour and that is what I was brought up with and I think I still remember it .

C.de S. I think when people think of the West and things Celtic they tend to go into a sort of misty romanticism but the last thing one can say about your music is that it is misty or romantic in the sense that the colours are very vibrant the shapes are very clear cut. Are you suggesting that this is a reflection of what you saw?

G. LL With *lernin* I was always likened to Rutland Boughton and his Celtic Twilight and I objected to this because I didn't like that sort of thing at all I had seen the opera in West End and just didn't like it and for me Cornwall was a much more vigorous affair.

C.de S. Let's talk about Cornwall in the thirties. You've already described it - you've already described the wonderful colour of the sea and the luminosity around St Ives. Your childhood was spent in that kind of area, wasn't it?



The colours of Cornwall

G.LL. Yes, in St Ives itself, in a house overlooking the bay and well I was born there and then I was. there we went away for a couple of years when my father was in France an the trenches r and my sister and I were sort of farmed out in Sussex but otherwise the whole time 'I was brought up in St Ives an I can remember looking out of my window and there were torpedo destroyers that were based in the harbour and they suddenly all they or were all. thy dashed out of the harbour and they went into the bay and they dropped depths charges so (little laugh) I had fairly early recollections of what war was all about, and then these poor devils they were tied up in the harbour and some idiot of a of a commander who was based in Penzance he ordered these urn a little very small torpedo boat about destroyer size to go round he had to round lands end and there was a most violent storm at the time and they said well we cant do it you know and he said you will come round and they got about a mile out of St. Ives and they were all blown onto the rocks and there was the most tremendous series of explosions. I remember waking up and hearing all these explosions.

C.de S. Extraordinary.... What did you do, how did you spend your boyhood? You went to school in the normal way, did you?

G.LL. No I didn't that's just it – I had a series rheumatic fever attacks and in fact 3 times altogether when I was 8 years old I had spent 9 months in bed ion this house overlooking the bay, and then a couple of others in later times so I had no formal schooling at all until I was 12 when I went to a prep school in Falmouth and when I was 14 and a half I put a pistol to my fathers head and I said, look, I am a bit late whatever happens, it is time I got busy learning to be a musician and he was very sympathetic to that and that's when I started serious studies – 14 ½.

C.de S.

When did your musical talent first show itself?

G.LL. Oh heaven knows, I've no idea about that. I was brought up with music all around me in this house that my Father had - there was an enormous studio which had been built for one of the St Ives artists, and you could get quite literally a small orchestra in into this great studio and when my Father came back from the war and every weekend people gathered together and there were trios and quartets and so on I just grew up with that around me. I grew up with chamber music and I used to creep in and hear all this, and all my formative years were spent listening to chamber music. My Father was a very good amateur piano amateur flute player, my Mother played the piano and the violin and then all of a sudden later on I never wanted to listen to any more chamber music at all (laughter here) because I was seduced, quite literally seduced by the soprano voice, and the tenor voice, soaring above the orchestra, and I wanted plenty of brass and drums and no more chamber music.



George Lloyd at 14

C.de S. How did you get that experience of orchestral and vocal music?

G.LL. Well I must explain. and this goes some way towards explaining why I wrote *Lernin* in the way I did - My father was an opera aficionado and he knew an immense amount about opera- in particular all the early Italian writers – Cimeroso, Pergolezi, such like people, and he used to say to me, well, these composers they are just dictionary names, but one day you will see my boy, this is all going to be played. I could never make up my mind whether my father was 50 years behind the times or 50 years ahead of the times, but unfortunately, he never lived to see the day when these works are being played as he said they would.



William A C Lloyd in 1934

However it wasn't just that he loved these early very very early Italian operas - all Italian opera was grist to his mill and so while I was doing all my conventional studies here in London, - Albert Sammons, Harry Farjeon and violin composition, orchestration, playing with the orchestra, doing a lot of chamber music and all that sort of thing, - my Father would get hold of me and he would say "right now, here's a good scene" and he'd take something out of a, well a restoration play or Elizabethan play and he'd say 'now, right now, you set that to music.'

So I had to do this and of course I'd very quickly get stuck and he said 'well, let's have a look and see what Bellini would have done' or Rossini or someone like that and that was the way went.....So when it came to actually writing an opera I knew a little bit about it and all the time when I was...right from the early days of being a student my family used to really laugh at me because they said *Othello* was my bible - I never went anywhere without *Othello* - I just adored that score so.... and also another thing - my Father couldn't play the piano for toffee, he used to sort of play it with three fingers, four fingers, but he could do enough to play the tunes out of *Il Trovatore*, so from being a very small boy I would hear him playing *Trovatore*, *Traviata*, whatever it was... I'd got all those tunes in my head - in the early days it wasn't just Mozart and classics.

C.de S. Now, this is your father's own instinct to develop you as an opera composer. Why did, I mean I'm intrigued why you should have got so fascinated by the voice in the first place...there you were down the West country, presumably with not very much live music making going on no broadcasting how did you get the experience?

G.LL. Ah, well now, wait a minute, when I was well, when I started to study seriously, the time was 15 the family moved up here to London and I was always going everywhere I went to the Old Vic which was .. they gave very good performances

of Opera there. You paid about sixpence and had a good performance. And in the summer season Italian Opera at Covent Garden. So, I'd heard plenty of singing by the time I was 17, that was the music that I loved best and I suppose it narrowed my mind in some way, in that for me music consisted of Verdi and Puccini and opera. That was music and to hell with the rest of it.

C.de S. Obviously between you your father and you had made a decision that Italian opera was your favourite ethos as opposed to let's say German opera.

G.LL. Yes, yes, we didn't make a decision, we just knew that was the truth (laugh) I took myself off to hear I think, yes, it was, *Valkyrie*. I went to hear *Valkyrie* in great excitement. I thought that this was going to be a wonderful revelation something, well, my poor Father, he didn't understand that, but I was going to understand it, you know, so a tremendous revelation, it was going to start a new ... I was about 16 or 17 so this was really going to start something new to me and I went along and, oh dear (laugh) that was why one of my early disillusiones... I couldn't stand it!

For one thing I am a person that after three-quarters of an hour, fifty minutes, sixty minutes, I don't want to listen any more music, anything over that is a bit too much. So with an opera, well three quarters of an hour an hour, and then that's the end of the act and we go and stretch our legs and come back again - that's all the fun, but to have to sit there for, you know, six hours or whatever it is, I couldn't stand that. And then all these boring bits in between, I used to read Ernest Newman, great critic you know, and he would explain these boring weren't boring, and I tried to convince myself but never very successfully that was the set up with opera and then, well, I suppose you want to know, why did I eventually write *lennin*...?

C.de S. Well, I do, we'll come to that George. Just to tie up that – I mean that although you have said how much you favoured Italian opera and the vocal style, it wasn't long before you started writing symphonic music, orchestral pure and simple?

G.LL. Yes, that is true - the very first works, which, well, the very first works which I kept are orchestral works. I wrote an awful lot of songs and things, that I started writing choruses and all that kind of thing. That's all been put in the waste-paper basket. But the only things I kept are these very early symphonies.

C.de S. But how did that come about? Because they were all a result of music making in Cornwall, weren't they? I means you still, although you came to London, you still maintain a connection with Cornwall.

G.LL. Oh yes, we had a home in Cornwall which all my family thought of as our home, but we also existed for periods in London while we had to study and all the rest of it but as soon as terms were over, we made a dash for Cornwall. Well there was a lot of there was a lot of music going on there I told you how everybody used to gather in this studio my father played the chamber music but there was a very excellent amateur orchestra in Penzance and this was this had been founded by an extraordinary man who was a great character called Walter Barnes and he

played the violin and he conducted this orchestra and he was such a forceful personality that he just beat people into playing for him, It was a case one of those cases where if he got away when he was quite young and worked with the good professionals he could have really got somewhere, but he didn't for various family reasons and this and that.

He stuck where he did stick, but he produced his excellent amateur orchestra that was where my first symphony was played, almost as soon as I'd written it. I showed it to him, you know, and he said 'Oh I'll play that and within about 4 months of having written my 1st Symphony I was there conducting it, and well, we all played in the orchestra. My Father played the flute, my mother played the viola then and when I was around, I used to play the violin.



Walter Barnes by Stanhope Forbes

Now my father got to know all these people very very well indeed and he used to ask Walter Barnes to come to London in the summer when the Italian opera season and he'd stay for a short period and these two would go off to Convent Garden and one year this was about a year after I'd started really I'd done my first three symphonies that's right I just finished doing my third symphony and Walter Barnes turned up and he and my Father went off and next morning at breakfast these two grumbling away about the state of music in England and Walter Barnes said oh well you know with opera in Italy and opera in Germany and opera in France they all have their schools but we've got no school of opera isn't it terrible isn't it awful and these two went on about this and finally Walter Barnes said "Well if they cant produce English Opera what about Cornish Opera? now you two get to work and write an opera" he said. "If you write it, I'll get all the people together and we'll do it down in Penzance" so my father said, "You serious?" "oh yes" he said, "I will."

So, he went away, and my father disappeared into his study and after 3 or 4 days he turned up, yes, very quickly he turned up with the libretto of *Iernin* and well then, we went down to Cornwall to Zennor. And I wandered about the moors and looked at the stones and I saw everything and everything was very very vivid to me, and I used to have a funny sort of feeling about all those stones. In somewhere near the beginning of the opera the hero Geraint he says to the baritone 'Almost these stones seem to have life for me you know' and I really felt the same sort or way. There was something very mysterious up there on those moors, so I wandered around and I collected my tunes and within twelve months almost to the day, Walter Barnes came up to London again and they had their session at the opera but the night before he arrived I stayed up 'til about midnight I think to finish the score. I'd done the lot in the year.

So then thing was to get it all together, and what happened was that there were various professional singers for the main parts, there were one or two local singers, soloists, and of course the chorus was all local, because there was a local operatic society as well, and the orchestra was, well, supplemented a little bit by professionals. And some of the amateurs were there and we all got to work and produced it.

At that time there was a pavilion, one of these old sorts of seaside pavilions and it was done there, held about what 600 people, something like that. Now we were very fortunate because through a connection my father brought in a very good traditional producer, a man he was called Sydney Russell and he had started life as I think he started life as a Shakespearian actor then he finally had a voice and he became a character tenor and ended up as one of the producers of the BNOC. The British National Opera Company and he was engaged to produce this and to generally manage it well of course he knew everybody and knew where to get the right singers and so the thing was done as near



Rehearsing Iernin in St Ives. George mother Constance at the piano WAC and Walter Barnes at left, Gaby Valle, (soprano) centre.

as possible in the in the proper way due to this very competent producer he

also he worked for the Old Vic he worked all around the place, he knew his way about and he was an absolutely blessing to us. Because my father and I had written this thing and my father knew a lot about everything to do with opera, that's different from actually producing the thing, (laugh) my goodness me, a different ball game altogether. So, we were lucky to have this very very good professional the help up.

C.de S. And this is all with you conducting?

G.LL. Oh yes yes, I did the whole of the conducting - the rehearsing, the training of the singers and the choruses, I did the whole lot.

C.de S. Because by then you'd gone through the schools in London.

G.LL. Oh yes, I'd done all that. I never went to one of the big academies because when I first started, when I was 14 ½, Mother knew somebody who knew Albert Sammons so I was taken there to play to him and really just for advice and my mother wanted to know what to do with this little boy, and Albert said that he would teach me, so that was a tremendous thing. Because he wasn't really teaching at the Royal College, he just had a few pupils on the piano. Well because of that I couldn't go to the Royal College or the Royal Academy,

because you always had to do your first subject with them. If you were going somewhere else they didn't want to know anything about it, so what I did was to go to Trinity College.

Now Trinity College would accept students just for individual subjects. You were more or less a non-person - they didn't like you. I rather fancy it was the same sort of thing as with the other colleges - but it was very useful to me, because there was an excellent chamber musician there and I did all my quartets there. He was an Austrian cellist and he was recognised as being a very good cellist very very good trainer in chamber music at that time.

C.de S. Who was that?

G.LL. A Man called Le Bell I think. He had studied with Bruckner. He's quite forgotten now, but he was very very good and did orchestration and conducting and I studied conducting with another chap there and so I did all these bits and pieces at Trinity College. I was to some extent thrown in at the deep end because when Walter Barnes said he would play my first symphony it was understood he was going to do it, and he started rehearsing and he couldn't make head nor tail of it. He didn't know what to do, he was very much at a loss I suppose it was because he did mostly all the usual ones Beethoven Brahms Mozart, and this was something different so he got himself a little bit lost so in the end he said 'well come on George, you better do this.' so I picked up the baton and away I go - I didn't care a damn about anything. That's how it all started. I just felt I could do it. So then the opera came along it and it was just taken for granted that I would to conduct it.

C.de S. But am I right by then you had done your BBC debut?

G.LL. No, No, that came later. I hadn't by then no. I had by then done my first symphony with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra it wasn't until the following year - it was after Iernin was done at the Lyceum in London that I did my third symphony with the BBC Symphony.

C.de S. Let's get back to Penzance and the first performance of Iernin there you were conducting at the age of 21.

G.LL. Yes, yes that's right.

C.de S. And we're talking about 1934.

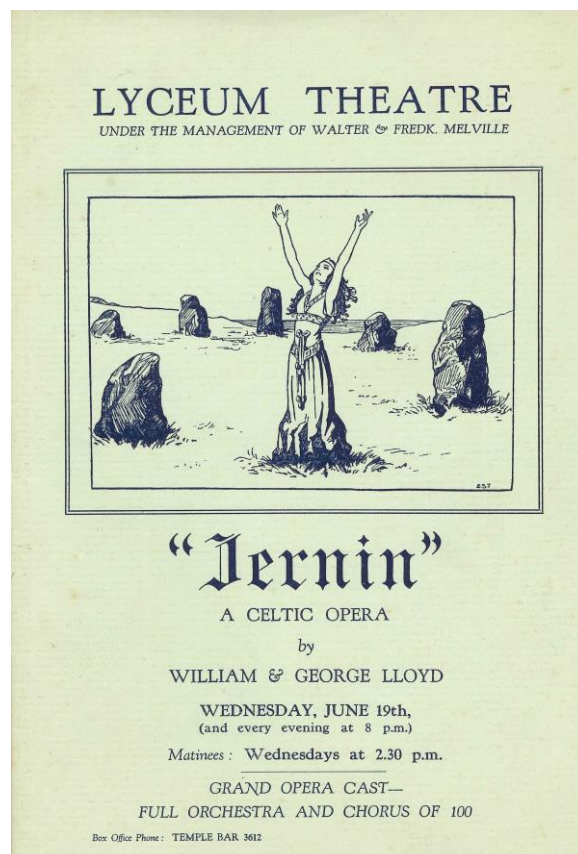
G.LL. That's correct; yes, the first performance was on the 5th of November 1934.

C.de S. Now who came? the townsfolk or the county folk?

G.LL. Oh well, you know Cornwall is not very great for county folk, it's not one of the shires, it's all very very different in Cornwall, very different, but the most important person who did come - and that was where we had our second piece of good luck, having roped in a very good producer - our second very great piece of luck was that Frank Howes, who was then the principle critic of The Times, and at that time The Times really did count for something - he was down there.

C.de S. *The Thunderer*

G.LL. Yes it was still *The Thunderer* - and he was down there on holiday and he came along to this performance, and he gave us the most fantastically good review and you know he sort of said 'well, here's a young boy out of the blue who writes an Opera as if he's been doing it all his life', that kind of thing and then everybody liked it so much they said 'well we've got to get this done somewhere in London' and this review was really our introductory card because otherwise nobody would have looked at us. So my Father set up a company and gathered together various people who helped to finance it and we just waited for a theatre, and as good fortune would have it there the Lyceum. That's the old Lyceum which was Irving's theatre, and which was still a very important theatre in London. I mean I first heard Chaliapin there and the *Ballet Russe* used to come there and all sorts of things happened therein fact I think it was at the Lyceum where they had a season of opera and Eugene Goossens was conducting and Chaliapin was singing, Chaliapin didn't like the way Goossens conducted and he came down to the footlights and started conducting himself and shouting at Goossens - this was a most enormous (laughter) affair



C.de S. Were you there?

G.LL. I wasn't - I wasn't there, but everybody knew all about that - Chaliapin telling the conductor what to do, standing at the footlights. So it was a fine theatre and it became available and we moved in there in June and we had a double cast with 3, actually 3 principal sopranos in a double cast and it was done every night plus some matinees and we had an excellent company - we had a marvelous orchestra. People don't realise what music in the 30's was really like in this country - there was so little work, very little work, and we had a friend who came from a famous orchestral family, and he knew everybody and he went around and he collected some of the best players in London at that time.

There were two great flute players in London one was Robert Merzy in the BBC and the other one was Gordon Walker, so we had Gordon Walker. We had the father of all modern clarinet players, Charlie Draper, and it was that sort of a little orchestra. It was small - it was 38 - 40, something like that, but was very good - we got a good chorus together because we had a man who had been chorus master in the BNOC and we had some of the leading singers of the day, One of the contraltos was Astrid Desmond who was famous all over the country. So it was

it was well done and everything was going fine - the audiences were getting bigger, and then all of a sudden there was a most devastating heat wave and in those days there were virtually no tourists coming to London. Nowadays its tourists who keep the theatres open whatever the weather is, but at that time if it got very very hot as it did, well nobody went to the theatre, and there were no tourists so the theatres just closed, and we there was not enough money behind the company so we just had to close down and that was the end of that.

C.de S. It must have been a very expensive operation. Even so, did you cover your costs in the end?

G.LL. Well, I suppose so, no, well, I think they lost a bit of money, but not much. Of course, things were not done in the extravagant way they are now, the scenery was very simple, and we were criticised for that because it was simple. Nowadays it would be probably very fashionable because there would be just two or three rocks and a backcloth and a little bush or something and that was the moor, you know. It was effective though, very effective, but it was not sufficiently grand for the critics.

C.de S. And in spite of that criticism people still came?

G.LL. Oh yes, yes because they just liked the music and, I don't know, something about it they all liked, we got so many of these people who were well known in music and the opera generally, and they all came along,

C.de S. Well now who came?

G.LL. Well, they all seemed to troop in - Beecham came in one evening and he walked in his usual way everybody knows about, and there he was. I mean he really did - he walked in and he was stroking his little beard and he sort of said 'Very good my boy, very good - you keep the interest going throughout the whole opera' - so that was a terrific compliment from Beecham. And Vaughan Williams turned up and I was not, - to put it politely, I was not a lover of Vaughan Williams at that time - since then I've grown to admire his music but at that time I didn't like it at all - so he marched in, you know, with his great big black farmer's boots on. (laughter) He didn't change in the evening - I remember seeing him at Queens Hall, he used to go around in his tweed coat and his great big



George Lloyd in the pit at The Lyceum, conducting *Iernin*.

enormous black boots - so he walked in 'It isn't fair it isn't fair, fair I've been trying all my life to write opera (laughter) ...so we had a lot of fun.

And then one day John Ireland came along, and of course I'd never met any of these people. Ireland came in and he said "Yes, yes" he said "bits of Stravinsky in that."

I said "What?" Well I didn't know the early ballets, because well the *Rite of Spring* was only done about once in twelve years you know, and I'd never actually hit it. I had seen Stravinsky at Queens Hall and this would be of course in his neo-classic period - and he was there with Dushkin and they were playing away and he just sat there with that mask over his face from start to finish - it was all at one level there was never a crescendo, there was no.... there was nothing ... and that to me was the absolute bottom - I thought this was dreadful, I it was not music, because I had to have it expressive and singing and so on. I hated such stuff.

I said 'What! 'to John Ireland 'What? Stravinsky! No there's no Stravinsky in that! 'Oh yes, there is,' he said "you know where you go - you've got that scene there - that's Stravinsky!" he said - 'that comes out of the 'Sacre'!

'What?' 'Well, you know the *Sacre*, don't you?

I said '- no I've never heard a note. 'You don't know it' - he said 'you've got to come round to my studio one evening and I'm going to play you the 'Sacre'

So, in due course I went round, and he had a nice supper and then he had a lovely studio at the end of a garden down in Chelsea and we went along. Now I could never play the piano, I mean I never could, I just play a few chords and it's really very very elementary, so he sits down at the piano with me alongside and he gets out Stravinsky's own four handed arrangement - you know well (laughter) I just sort of looked at this and I am always very very slow at reading music, terrible, however he managed to make some noises and get something into me to try and explain to me that I'd been influenced by Stravinsky. I couldn't say, but after that I had some wonderful, wonderful evenings, he went through so much of his own music with me one evening we spent and when I say evening he used to go on to about 4 or 5 in the morning yes quite literally he was he was fascinating and I learnt a tremendous lot. I never studied with him properly, but I did learn an awful lot from him, all the things that he told me and one evening one night we spent studying his piano concerto and he told me all about it and how he'd written it.



John Ireland

C.de S. John Ireland was instrumental in getting you your BBC debut, wasn't he?

G.LL. Yes, yes, he introduced me to Edward Clark who was the *eminence grise* at that time and he looked at it and he said yes, he'd play it.

C.de S. Play what

G.LL. My third symphony.

C.de S. So, you did, and you had the BBC Symphony Orchestra and you at the helm?

G.LL. And yes, it was me there and that was that was very good because that was a fine orchestra then.

C.de S. So, this record-breaking run because it was still holds the record breaking its still what the third...?

G.LL. No. Now that that has been slightly exaggerated - it was I think in terms of figures it was third longest run or something like that - the number one in this series was *The Immortal Hour* and number two was Sullivan's *Ivanhoe* and I came a long way No 3.

C.de S. Still?

G.LL. Which doesn't say very much for the school of English opera, does it.

C.de S. No, it doesn't, but a lot has happened to British opera since then. And one of the things that has happened is that as a result of *Iernin*, you got a Covent Garden commission.

G.LL. Yes, well, no not a proper commission, but it was played there - it was done in 1938.

C.de S. We have sort of left *Iernin*, a few weeks before you got married 1934.

G.LL. No, I was married in 1937 – I was in between operas, I was writing *The Serf*, then.

C.de S. OK right, so *Iernin* hit the boards in London, and it was heated off because the heat wave emptied the theatres, - unthinkable now with air-conditioning, and very sad. Did you conduct all those performances?

G.LL. All except about 2 of them. What had happened was that the chorus master who was excellent, very good musician, he had said that he would relieve me and do a couple of matinees that sort of thing, and well, less than a week before the first performance I had actually started rehearsing and I think I was rehearsing the orchestra, he pulled out of it – he felt he could not do it, it he didn't feel up to it, and so there we were and I was left high and dry and Sydney Russell the producer, he knew a lot of people and he scurried around to try and find somebody, some operatic man who would come in at the very last minute who did not know a single note of the work and take and do something to help me and he found Arthur Hammond the Carl Rosa conductor, and he walked in while I was actually rehearsing the orchestra and he did he did I think two performances something like that, and I did the rest.

C.de S. You must have felt then that you had arrived?

G.LL. No, I never felt I arrived the (laughter) No I never will arrive (laughter) no I don't think so, no that's not part of my nature. I do grumble every so often. I grumble about other conductors, I grumble about performers, but I also grumble about myself - I grumble about myself a lot, so I never felt that I'd arrived.

C.de S. But George, even the most sanguine view would have to tell you that this is a remarkable thing that had happened - an opera had come out of Penzance by chance, had hit London, had a three-week run with all the great names of the day coming?

G.LL. Yes, well I suppose I was probably rather arrogant, - in some ways I was very arrogant, and, in some ways, I was humble, because what happened then was exactly the same as happens now - a lot of people went absolutely overboard over this opera. I mean there were people who I got to hear about it afterwards who were coming night after night, or 5, 6, 7 times they would come to that, - they just went overboard. There were others who thought that I should go back to school, that I didn't know anything at all, and who really very actively disliked it. And it's exactly as the same as happens now.

So, fine, I was in some ways quite shy and didn't know how to handle people and I found that here would be people writing to me, - poets, all sorts of people would write, and admiring this opera, and I just didn't know what to say, so I probably just threw the letter in the waste paper basket and upset a lot of people about this, and it was simply a way of.... it was because I was embarrassed.... but when people did come and say that these were the people that had gone overboard and they said how fantastic it was, my reply was - well I didn't tell them to their face but I told my family, - I said 'silly old fool, he doesn't know what he was talking about - I'm not Verdi,' - and this is the point - I just knew that I was not Verdi....it was all right up to a point, but why exaggerate it? And people do the same now - they exaggerate to such an extent that I can't understand it, but other people exaggerate the other way, and that happened right from the beginning. ⁱ

C.de S. It does seem though, doesn't it, that *lennin* was, that you were kind of, destined to write *lennin*. You'd had this rather unusual upbringing, you'd had a very unusual Father, who'd understood opera, you had written a lot of choruses you had set scenes you'd done an extremely deep apprenticeship in the setting of drama, you'd written a couple of symphonies, you had orchestral technique under your belt, and then suddenly as though from nowhere, out comes *lennin* ... Did you think always want and intend to be an opera composer?

G.LL. Yes, yes, for me it was really the only form of music to which I responded wholeheartedly. The other I had listened to and admired, but that for me was something apart, was special. That was the way music should be ... that was what music was all about.

So, then I set to work, and I wrote *The Serf* and that was a serious, a very serious deep sort of a thing and it was really all a bit too much for me, and it was badly produced, but that's another story. And then after the war I wrote *John Socman* and everything went wrong with that also, for a thousand reasons - everybody was

fighting everybody, I was still unwell - my health was very bad at that time, but I managed to produce the score and I was exhausted, so I said right, I'm finished.

John Socman was toured all over the country by the Carl Rosa company, and there was a festival or big do or something at Belfast and they asked me to go over there for it, and I went over there and I was so appalled at the way it was being done that I walked out, and I said I would never go in a theatre again and that's what happened - I never went inside a theatre for 17 years. And then I started writing again, so eventually started writing orchestral things, but for many years now I just feel I've missed the boat.

Because I was developing the technique of writing for the stage and I felt that I had got a much better grip, - I knew when to have a *cantilena* passage, when to have a tune, when to have declamation, when pure recitative, when the orchestra wouldyou know, all these little things. I felt I understood a lot more about it and I should have gone on developing - I really should have, and I didn't for all these various reasons which came to stop me and that's the end of it. And I just feel I've missed the boat - I should have gone on writing opera, but I didn't.

C.de S. And you won't write another one?

G.LL. Well, I don't know, it's a big undertaking, now, and I just don't think I could face it. What's more I'm not very happy about the way a lot of operas are produced now. I think there is too much exaggeration, too much power given to the directors. For me, the power should be with the singers, this was what I was trying to do in all the operas right from the very start. I was trying to express the drama through voice, not just through something in the orchestra - in fact I think that it may have been Frank Howes, or it may have been one of those critics at the time *Iernin* was played, - they noticed that I was delineating the character of the part by the actual melodic line - this is what I was seeking to do. I was trying to get the meaning and the character into the vocal line, not just some expressive sound coming out of the orchestra with the voice declaiming it and it was developing that way, and that was what I hoped to do with opera and of course its all come to nothing.

C.de S. That's very much the Italian school, that's the Verdi school.

G.LL. Well, yes, that the Italian school, that's what Verdi was doing. I mean the perfect example is the quartet from *Rigoletto*. We've got four characters and you've got 4 separate melodic lines, which was my ideal.

C.de S. Unfair question - perhaps there's an interesting answer are there parts in *Iernin* you'd want to revise, or look at again, in view of your later experience?

G.LL. Well, I don't think I could rewrite it. When we did it together with the BBC Chris, I had to study it very deeply because I have studied my own works as if they were somebody else's works. So, I started really studying that, and I thought 'Oh My God this is thin', you know, 'why do I just have these poor notes?' ...a very wretched accompaniment or something, you know, because I've been writing so

much more richly for the orchestra since then. Oh, this is terrible... but after a while I said 'No don't touch it, leave it absolutely as it is' - because I had at least.... I think it has a sort of freshness which can only come from a young inexperienced person.

There are things I know you can look at and say 'well, that's not very well handled, and the orchestra is not very good'. but I've never changed it. The only things from the original score when it went into production in Penzance, we found there were certain little places, we found alright well, we cut out three bars there because when somebody is coming in, it just goes on a bit There were a few little places like that and we changed all those eventually. I tidied up the score. And when I came to study it with you the score was precisely the same except for some dynamics. I'm always changing dynamics and that's a natural thing to do as the sound of the orchestra has changed so much. The modern orchestra is so different to what it was in 1934.

C.de S. How?

G.LL.

Well to start with the most glaring example is the horns - the horns and the brass make so much sound now which they didn't then, and the percussion is different, a lot of things are different, and so it is quite natural that now you've got to adjust those dynamics - it's the same as, ..I mean when I conduct *Flying Dutchman* or something like that, if you let the orchestra play as it is written.... Wagner put those double *fortissimos* and all the rest of it you can't hear a thing. You don't hear what he meant, and you don't hear what he would have heard. So, if I do anything like that, I make no bones about it - I change dynamic whether Wagner, Verdi, or Methuselah himself wrote it, I will change the dynamics.



Cunaide, Iernin and Gerent

C.de S. What's your favourite thing in this score, the passage you're most proud?

G.LL. Oh my goodness, I shall have to think about that oh (pause) well, I rather like the whole ending - I think that I think the end of it has a certain sort of magic and so I rather like that.

C.de S. Did that come to you wandering amongst the stones?

G.LL. (Laugh) so much of it did yes, yes. I really lived and breathed this opera you know, in a way perhaps I've never done with anything else. It was it was really part of me, and all that very unconsciously, which I think gives a certain vivacity, a certain something to it ...

C.de S. Truth?

G.LL. Truth yes, yes, perhaps that's it... and that's something that you can't find again when you reach my advanced age (laugh). It's gone!

C.de S. Well, I was coming to that, George because it must have.... knowing what a lot of people know of what you've been through since writing and doing *lennin* for the first time - the disappointment at Covent Garden, the disaster of the war, the health problems after the war and the problems surrounding *John Socman* and your eventual virtual retirement from the musical scene, - you came back, you surprised the musical world, delighted the musical world. You came back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, you brought back something from pre-war England, England, something we had all forgotten about, and then this for me a wonderful thing, - that you came back to direct *lennin*, to conduct *lennin* in the studio, almost 50 years to the day that you had done it in London. I mean for a start that 50 years seems quite incredible that anybody could sort of do two things 50 years apart. What did it mean to you to be back there on the rostrum with this particular piece?

G.LL. Well, I think primarily I think I wanted to do it with you. In a way I felt would be as near as we could in the particular circumstances in which it was played as near as possible the way that I felt the music. I remember saying to you at the time when you first broached the subject of doing it together, I said to you "Chris you have to understand I want to conduct this myself."

C.de S. I was lying on the floor where that microphone is now, this very floor when you said that...

G.LL. Yes, and the reason I gave was this... I said there are so many admirable characters about - technically very competent, but I don't know of anybody who would actually believe that this story had an element of truth in it.

You see for me; I half believe that a stone (laughter) can become a woman! This whole magic business - I know I don't believe it, but I still think it is in the realms of possibility. I always felt that. As because as the tenors said these stones they seem to have life to me, and all that country, that whole thing, whole atmosphere of the place of West Penwith, it seemed to alive to me, and then when I looked and

thought about *lernin* I said, yes, I half believe all that, and half believing is better than not believing at all.

I felt that if you had some perhaps rather cynical guy doing this, it just wouldn't mean anything, because, as you know, there are a lot of very, very competent clever people who can handle an orchestra probably more efficiently than I do, but it's that funny little indescribable thing which will give it some life.. and that was why, and that was what I was feeling.

Of course (sigh) when you conduct those sort of things you can't afford to have any of those sort of thoughts, or any of those feelings, because you are up against the clock and you have got to (laugh) try and get to the end of the number (laugh) before it's time to stop and you are up against all that and will the second bassoon come in and play the right note at the right time and all those things – it's always the same with conducting - you can't think of anything very imaginative to be concentrating on.



**The Nine Maidens Stone Circle, near Zennor
Carn Galva behind. (Picture Tim Pearson)**

C.de S. I've got several memories of the recording session and one is at the beginning of the week, I think the orchestra meeting you for the first time had their guard up but by the end of the week they were totally in love with you and your music and I think great friendships were made.

G.LL. Yes, well, it's normal for an orchestra to have its guard up. Sometimes orchestras exaggerate - I mean there are some orchestras about, (though I won't mention their names) but it's their sport to try and bring down the conductor. We were a little unfortunate - there was one particular person, I won't mention his name, and he really had it in for me and he almost wrecked the whole thing, but (laugh) he was put on the carpet actually. I remember my wife said to me 'don't worry - he will come and apologise tomorrow morning before you start work' and I said 'Oh no, no, I am afraid he hates me for good and all,' and sure enough, there he was coming into my room (laugh) before we started and at the end of it. As my wife also said 'I've seen this before, George, he'll end up in your arms' and I thought - 'Oh, go on, it's not possible, not after all the things he's said to me' and he was really very vulgar, and it was frightful what he said, and I just took no notice of him, and sure enough, when the thing was ended, he got hold of me and he took me somewhere in the corner, and he put his arms round me, and he said

'George, I love you, George, I love you, it's been a most wonderful experience' you know, so funny things do happen!

C De S: Well, you've mentioned your wife, you've mentioned dear Nancy there, George, this was the first time she'd heard that piece?

G.LL. Yes, she'd always wanted to hear it, because she had known something about, well, well it's a long, long, story, about the Swiss connection, but she knew about my family because my young brother had been over there in her village to a school nearby and he used to come to their home and so she heard about this fellow called George, who'd written an opera called *Iernin* - this was before ever we met, so she knew about it, so she'd always wanted to hear the thing, to see if it was any good or it wasn't.

C De S: What did she think?

G.LL. Well, she seems to like it, which is just as well, because she is my severest critic and I know that I have to please her. If I don't please her, it's the end of the world.

C De S: Add a Postscript, George. There were people who, once we'd broadcast this piece, wrote to you to say, 'I was there at the pavilion in Penzance' and

they were sending you the cast list and memories came flooding back. Quite remarkable - it had once again, it had reached back through the years, past those curious times we've all been through - the 50's, the 60's the post war 40's, the pre-war hot sunny 30's, all came flooding back.

G.LL. Yes, that's perfectly true it has come back, and in fact it's been...it's actually been skipping generations because only last year, 1993, I had a lady who got in touch with me because her uncle had played in the orchestra, so it's skipping generations now. Funny thing it was also to sum up a fantastic experience for me, because to have really the whole of the of musical side of an opera to have to look after, the training to do, the rehearsing, the performance, everything, and do it night after night, and still keep more or less sane - it was a very, very, good experience.

On top of that I was so fortunate in some of these great players ... having Charlie Draper the clarinet, and he took me under his wing and I went to his house and he came to our house and he used to play and he used to say 'Well you see this



Nancy Lloyd, nee Juvet 1937

about the clarinet '.. and taught me so much. And there were a lot of the players like that, - horn player, trumpet player, bassoon player - they all used to say (*Ed: whisper here*) and they encouraged me over that, because I was always trying to find out about this or that instrument, and what should I do and what I shouldn't I do with it, and I was very fortunate there. So it was, by and large, a wonderful experience for young man.

C De S: George thank you very much indeed

G.LL. Thank you Chris.

Postscript: A curious memento....



Iernin's slipper, from which the composer/conductor and the leading lady drank champagne in 1934.

(And yes, drinking champagne from a lady's slipper really was a thing in those heady days...)

ⁱ This remark "I am not Verdi" refers to George's rebuff to John Christie at Glyndebourne, who had offered George an apprenticeship on condition he '*wrote a masterpiece.*' George had the temerity to reply that if Christie thought a masterpiece could be written to order, was mistaken. The correspondence with Christie will be published in the forthcoming biography.