

A Slow Recovery and two symphonies. 1945 – 1949.

Switzerland 1939



West Wittering 1943



Chateau D'Oex 1945

By the end of the war in September 1945, and 2½ year after the torpedo strike on *HMS Trinidad*, the symptoms of George's PTSD had improved sufficiently that he was re-assessed as '30% disabled' by the Ministry of Pensions. Within a month of the war in Europe ending, Nancy took him to Switzerland, to her home at Prima Flora, a busy *pension* in the village of quiet Alpine village of Chateaux D'Oex , in the mountains of the Bernese Oberland, where they had first met and married. They wanted to get away from war-damaged London, and to help George's recovery with sunshine, fresh air, and good food. Most importantly they went because Nancy could work as a cook, chambermaid and general *factotum* at Prima Flora, and so earn their keep. The pension was owned and run by Nancy's Irish mother, and attracted English speaking visitors, who regularly came to Chateaux D'Oex bringing pupils to the renowned English School. Nancy's wages and George's disability pension were their only regular income for the next three years, and even the wages were uncertain due to the austerity and foreign exchange restrictions imposed by the British government as they rebuilt the economy after the war.

While recovering at West Wittering, George has learned to hold a pen again, and to control the sever shaking which had been one of the most distressing physical symptoms of his injuries. He began work on his 4th Symphony as soon as they arrived at Prima Flora and a year later in September 1946, he

had completed the Full Score. The correspondence archive suddenly springs to life as he began the unending task of writing letters to conductors, orchestras and radio stations trying to get his music performed. In the whole of the period since he left hospital in 1942 until he arrived in Switzerland, the only letters in the file, apart from family correspondence, are some words of encouragement from Rutland Boughton and a letter of thanks to Albert Ganz, who had paid for him to see a Harley Street doctor about his PTSD symptoms. There followed a short exchange with the Ministry of Pensions trying to secure his disability pension, and that was the limit of his correspondence for 3 years.

Once in Switzerland, he was obviously keen to make a fresh start, and he began by arranging *HMS Trinidad March* for full orchestra. His effort was rewarded in January 1946, when Ernest Ansermet and the *Orchestre de la Suisse Romande* played the orchestral version of *HMS Trinidad March*, and arranged a broadcast and radio interview with the composer. The Swiss stations Radio Geneva and Radio Svizzera Italiana followed suit.

By April 1946 he was writing to radio stations in France and Switzerland, with no success, and Switzerland and as soon as the score of the 4th was finished, he doubled and redoubled those efforts. By the end of the year he had written to the major British publishers, Boosey, Chappelle and Novello, as well as French publishers and even German publishers Ernst Eulenburg who Schotts, who had taken refuge in Switzerland after being expelled from Germany before the war. (Eulenburg were agents for Goodwin & Tabb, who had handled all of George's music hire for the last 10 years and were taken over by Schotts in the 1950s.) He wrote to Eric Warr at the BBC and the London Philharmonic, and began an effort to contact American orchestras through George Estabrooks, Nancy's psychologist brother in law, who specialised in treating PTSD for the US Army. By the end of 1946, the result of this great effort amounted to three broadcasts on three Swiss radio stations, otherwise, nothing. He began to keep a file of rejection letters so



George at Prima Flora 1945

that he could keep track of exactly what had replied, and what had been said.

George was methodical and consistent in his approaches to orchestras and conductors. He would send a CV and information about his achievements in opera, with a polite letter proposing a performance. He could offer two operas and four symphonies, the latest of which was only just completed, together with a clutch of excellent reviews and features, some of which placed him high up in the ranks of English composers. These works would be costly undertakings for any orchestra, particularly the operas and the huge Fourth Symphony, and he knew that the chances of a performance were slim, so he made up separate scores and orchestra parts for extracts from *The Serf*. He prepared the *Overture*, the *Norman March* and the *Entr'Acte* in this way and

offered them as short pieces which would stand on their own in a programme. Sometimes he would send a score unsolicited, and sometimes he would wait to be asked for a score. Either way he would often have to send reminders to get the scores returned .

1947 did not start well. All his proposals were declined, and the pile of rejection letters grew steadily. He made an ambitious plan for European performances of *The Serf* and wrote to the British Council in various European countries with the suggestion that they might produce the opera, which he considered contained some of his best music. They replied unanimously that the subject matter had little appeal for European audiences, and another door was firmly closed.

In the spring of 1947, just a few months after George had completed his Fourth Symphony and was getting back on track, Nancy fell ill with a large ovarian cyst, and major surgery was required. All went well, but she could do no work for several months, so they took a small apartment in the village of Corcelletes, on the shores of Lake Neuchatel. The rent was paid out of George's pension but their small savings, accumulated from an irregular trickle of a few pound's worth of royalties from Goodwin and Tabb, dwindled. George's head was buzzing with tunes and as soon as he began writing them down, he was aware that the source of his music was beginning to run freely once again, for the first time in almost 10 years. They stayed in Corcelettes for 5 months during the glorious summer of 1947, while Nancy recovered from her operation and George wrote his 5th Symphony – a period he later described as 'probably the happiest of his life.'



The piano at Courcelletes, where George wrote his 5th Symphony

When he had finished the 5th he turned his attention to getting a performance and began with what he thought his best chance of success: Ernest Ansermet, who had played and broadcast *HMS Trinidad March*

the previous year. Ansermet returned his score, and his reply was polite, and mildly encouraging, but it was, in reality, yet another rejection.

“Indeed, it is an estimable work and one which I would conduct with interest, although it is some distance from the taste and inclinations of our audience, so I cannot see myself giving a performance. If you are asking me for my opinion of the quality, there are points where the intention exceeds the musical power, or to put it another way, times when we hear the man rather than the composer. But this only shows up in places, and it would be a pity if you were not to try to have it played elsewhere - particularly in England, where I intend to mention it to people. Maybe there would be a possibility of my playing it there. ” (Translation: WGL)

He offered the symphony to the BBC and sent a manuscript score to the Music Department. On 16th August 1947 he was informed that the work had not been approved for broadcast, but that they were ‘very interested’ in it and offered a ‘New Works’ rehearsal. Lloyd declined this as ‘unsuitable’ and asked for the return of all scores still with the BBC.

The pile of rejection letters was still growing, and with the negative response from the BBC and no performances in sight they had to review their position. George was still an outsider in the music world. He had some enthusiastic audiences for his operas and his symphonies, and some enthusiastic critics, but he did not have the support of a major publisher, or a university, or a publicist, or an agent, most of which would normally be considered essential for a young and barely known composer to make any progress with performances and broadcasts. He knew from his early experience in getting performances of his first three symphonies that the most effective route had been to tramp around the streets of London with the score under his arm, knocking on doors trying to talk conductors and orchestra managers into a performance, and sitting in waiting rooms until they agreed to see him. It had worked before and it might work again. They decided to return to England and see what could be done, and on October 1947 they were back in the house at 69 Priory Road, NW6, now repaired after wartime bomb damage.

Will and Puss spent part of their time at Priory Road, and part in the cottage in Zennor. Will was now 62, and was in intermittent poor health, which George and Nancy believed was due in part to the strain of his war service as an Admiralty Courier. When war broke out, he was 54 and considered too old for active service, despite his military experience in the first World War, but he volunteered and became an Admiralty Courier. His job was to carry more or less secret documents such as minelaying charts and codebooks, from the Admiralty building in London to Royal Navy ships and submarines all over the country, where he handed them over to the ships officers and returned to London. He had lived ‘on the road’ for several years during the war, travelling by train and by car and occasionally by air, often looking after several courier bags as well as his personal kit, and with a revolver in his pocket. For most of the war he was seldom at home, he did not eat well, and he slept badly. His high hopes for George’s success as an opera composer had been shattered by the torpedo strike on *HMS Trinidad*, and he had become depressed by George’s continuing struggle with his fragile mental state, his volatile temper and his painfully slow

recovery, but George's return to England, and to composition, gave him a new start.

Although George himself was much improved by Nancy's care in Switzerland and he had been able to complete two major symphonic works, he was still volatile, fragile, and deeply troubled by the symptoms of his PTSD, which were severe enough to prevent him from leading a normal life. He could not bear to be in the company of anyone but Nancy and his immediate family, due in part to his nervous tic and his violent mood swings. He could be socially embarrassing and clearly needed further psychological treatment, but he refused absolutely to have anything to do with psychiatrists, doctors or hospitals. Back in England, George and Nancy renewed their acquaintance with a benefactor, the barrister Mr Albert Ganz, who in 1935 had so admired the opera *Iernin* that had commissioned the bronze portrait head by sculptor Wilfrid Dudeney. Albert Ganz once again offered to pay for George see a doctor in Harley Street for treatment, and George agreed only after he made Nancy promise him that he would not return to hospital.

Despite his symptoms, George had gone back in England to try to get performances for the two heavyweight scores of Symphonies 4 and 5, which represented three years' work, but which had not yet been played. After arranging for the copying and printing of the full scores and orchestra parts for the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, he used the formula that had worked for him in the past. He contacted every significant orchestra, conductor and radio station in Europe and America, sending out scores, sometimes by arrangement and sometimes unsolicited, and following up with requests for a performance, reminders or requests to get the scores returned. From Priory Road in late 1947 and early 1948, he wrote to Luxembourg, Germany, Belgium, Italy, France, and Stockholm. He sent personal letters and scores to orchestras in Washington, Baltimore, Nashville, Boston, Cleveland, Kansas, Connecticut, Toronto, Montreal, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia, with no result. He pleaded with conductors including Stokowski, Toscanini, Malcolm Sargent, Walter Susskind and John Barbirolli. (In early 1948 he had sent the manuscript of the 4th Symphony to John Barbirolli, and after a long delay with no reply, he wrote to enquire as to whether it had been lost in the post. He received a reply to the effect that Barbirolli was ill after a motor accident and asking if the score should be kept until he was well, or if it should be returned. Lloyd wrote a mildly barbed reply and asked for it to be sent back.) He and Nancy travelled to Amsterdam to meet with the conductor of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, who accepted his Fourth Symphony and then suddenly changed his minds. He made some progress and obtained a few performances of short pieces by the orchestra in Marseille, with Rudolf Schwarz and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, with the Yorkshire Symphony Orchestra and with the BBC Third Programme and the Home service, and but these were fleeting triumphs and he could not get anyone interested in his major works, the Symphonies, which he knew would appeal to audiences if only they were played.

The pile of rejection letters was growing much faster than the file of performances, and the elation the composer felt at completing his two big symphonies turned once again to frustration and despair. The reasons given were various, but they most revolved around the idea that audiences did not like new music, and that George's works were too 'weighty.' Interestingly, not one of the rejection letters

suggested that the work was too conservative, (which was to become the standard reason for rejection a few years later), but rather that it was too 'new' and too 'modern.'

George still had a few heavy friends in the music world from his successes before the war, and in 1948, he had an inkling of a breakthrough. The Arts Council underwent a major reorganization and established a new Opera and Ballet Panel. The Panel comprised about a dozen of the great and the good, and included John Christie, the founder of Glyndebourne, who had invited George to join him in 1937, Frank Howes, the music critic of *The Times* whose review of *Iernin* had launched George's sudden rise from nowhere, and Mrs Phillips, the proprietor of the Carl Rosa Opera Company, who had been a friend and associate of George and his father since they established The New English Opera Company in 1936. George did his best to plead his cause with his contacts on the panel, and due largely to the persistent and intractable Mrs Philips, he suddenly found himself catapulted into the highest rank of English opera. In late 1948 he was asked if he would accept a commission to write an opera for The Festival of Britain for the Carl Rosa Company, alongside Benjamin Britten for Covent Garden and Ralph Vaughan Williams for Sadler's Wells.

If George Lloyd's rollercoaster of a life were to be represented as a graph, the Festival of Britain commission would be one of the three highest peaks. He would be paid £300, (approximately £20,000 in today's money, 2019) and the company would receive a subsidy of £5000 (about £330,000.00 in 2019 money) The opera would tour to Bristol, Leeds, Glasgow, Sheffield and Belfast, and would stay in the company repertoire for a year.

The commission electrified George and his father. After 10 lean years without a major performance, at last they were back in business. George accepted the commission immediately, and his father Will agreed to write the *libretto*. Father and son were under no illusions as to the scale of the undertaking. They both knew that George was still weak, and Will's health was uncertain, but it was the chance of a lifetime. The horrors of *HMS Trinidad* and 4 years' worth of rejection letters were behind him, he had been endorsed as one of the first rank of composers and had a commission fee that would put food in his mouth. It was all to play for – again.