

George Lloyd – Education 1913 to 1931

1st Draft

George Lloyd's formal education, both musical and academic, was unorthodox and delayed. When Alan Sykes, the Radio 3 interviewer asked him whether he had been a talented boy violinist, his reply was cautious. *'Only up to a point,'* said George, *'because I had a lot of ill health. I had a series of rheumatic fever attacks - 3 times altogether when I was 8 years old, I spent 9 months in bed in our house overlooking St Ives Bay, and then a couple of other attacks later on, so I had no formal schooling at all until I was 12''*



George, aged 8

That school was Belmont, a boarding prep school in Falmouth, where George started in September 1925. It was a small school of only thirty boys and its main sports were football, cricket, boxing and athletics. His school reports and articles in tri-annual school magazine, *The Lion*, offer several insights into George's early character. In his first year he had 51 days absence due to illness, including a bout of measles. The fact that he was entered in to every event on sports days suggests he was at the very least one of the gamest in his small school. As far as actual prowess went, it was a mixed picture. He had energy and attack, certainly, using his weight and playing a 'vigorous' game of football, although he had a 'weak kick.' He had a 'vigorous bout' of boxing against poor Wheeler, who, despite being quicker and neater, suffered 'powerful body blows' from which George gained the advantage. Indeed *'in the final, Lloyd's opponent was on the retreat from the beginning and Lloyd was awarded the match very early in the proceedings.'* He was fast too, at least relative to the other thirty, winning the 100 yards and coming second in the 220 yards and 440 yards. At cricket he was a conscientious wicket-keeper, winning his colours and taking a respectable number of wickets, but according to his report he tended to snatch at the ball. *'If he was a little less easily flurried,'* his report remarked, *'he would meet with more success.'*



George at Belmont School, Back Row far Right



At Belmont School, Falmouth

With music, however, his schoolteachers were in no doubt. George was already a competent musician when he arrived at Belmont School, and had begun composing at 9 years old. He became obsessed with the violin from an early age, and according to *The Lion*: 'Lloyd (at 13 years old) supplied us with one of the very best musical items of the evening and showed a talent which cannot but develop advantageously in time to come. His handling of the violin, his confidence and evident relish with which he throws himself heart and soul into the music all call for the highest commendation.' On that occasion he played *Air and Hornpipe* from *Sonata in Bb* by the 18th Century court composer William Babell.

NIGHT.

Peace, Prince of all, doth rule the night,
When the birds are sleeping in their nest
And the light of day has gone.
All is quiet on this night
Save the trickle of a rippling stream,
The hum of some fiery dragon fly
In search of a treasure,
That none shall know except herself.
No elm doth quiver in her trunk,
No living creature move,
For peace commandeth all to rest
Until to-morrow morn.

G. Lloyd.

whose natural verse style had a curiously persistent 'old-fashioned' feel which was later to lead to some criticism when used for opera librettos in the 1930s.

George stayed only 2 years at Belmont School. By the time he was fourteen he knew that he was going to be composer, he spent as much time as possible playing the violin, and he realised that he had missed out on learning the rudiments of music theory. In George's words he 'put a pistol to his father's head' about getting started with his musical education. He asked if he might leave school and concentrate exclusively on his music studies. William acceded but said that he didn't want his son to "turn into an ignorant musician" so undertook to educate him himself. For two years, further interrupted by



illness, he was tutored on the violin and piano by his mother and in composition by his father. Miss Gladys Coombes was engaged to assist with the education of George and his older sister Marianne, and a French lady by the name of Zellie (surname unknown) taught them French and Italian.



The Lloyd's house – *St Eia* in St Ives - was always filled with music. There was chamber music every weekend, and sometimes a small orchestra would play in the enormous studio at *St Eia* originally built for Julius Olsson, one of the founders of the St Ives artists' colony. *"When my Father came back from the war, every*

weekend people gathered together and there were trios and quartets,' George recalled in an interview with Chris de Souza. *I just grew up with chamber music and I used to creep in and hear all this, and all my formative years were listening to chamber music. My Father was a very good amateur flute player, my Mother played the piano and the violin. And then suddenly, later on, I never wanted to listen to any more chamber music at all, 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. '*

The musical activities at *St Eia* attracted the attention of two dynamic Cornish conductors who had significant influence on George in his teens, Dr Rivers and Walter Barnes of the Cornwall Symphony Orchestra. Barnes, a fine violinist, had founded the Penzance Orchestra in 1907, and recruited both George's parents as members, playing flute and viola, respectively and he frequently made regular trips with Will to Covent garden. In 1926 he took George under his wing, teaching violin, placing him in a back desk of the orchestra and later giving him his first taste of conducting.

Shortly after he left Belmont to pursue a musical education, George began lessons in composition and counterpoint from Dr. Conway of Chichester Cathedral, where he spent a year. By the age of 16 it was clear that George's abilities as a musician exceeded the capacity of his teachers and he needed to be stretched beyond what they could provide. *"They didn't really know what to do with me"* George recalled. *"Oh well, you'd better go and play to Albert Sammons and he'll tell you what to do. So, I went along, and Albert said 'Well, all right. I'll teach this kid.'" Sammons had made his reputation as England's finest violinist a decade earlier and had recently made the first recordings of the Elgar *Violin Concerto in B Minor* the Henry Wood and the Queens Orchestra. For*

the 16-year-old George Lloyd, it was a turning point. The family moved to London, and George Lloyd's musical education began in earnest.

The certainty that he wanted to become a composer was unsurprising in the context of George's family background. His mother Primrose played the violin, the viola and the piano, and (just once!) the double bass. Cornish bard Jane Lofthouse recalled that George told her of the occasion when a rehearsal for the Messiah lacked a double bass player. George's mother was enlisted to play, and to accommodate her unfamiliarity with the instrument the finger positions were marked with chalk! George's paternal grandmother, American Frances Lloyd, had trained as an opera singer on the stage in New York before taking up painting and it was she who instilled in George's father William Lloyd his love for Italian opera. William himself was an accomplished flautist and in 1908, at the age of 20, he had written and published a memoir on the operas of Vincenzo Bellini – the first account of that composer's work to be written in English. William's book, based on earlier Italian biographies of Bellini and his own appreciation of the operas, was the work of a young amateur, not an academic, and in the words of *The Musical Times* "*it is more in the nature of a critical study of Bellini's operas than a detailed biography of the man himself.*" The biographical detail is superficial and by modern standards, repeating various errors from earlier works, but nevertheless, it was to be 60 years before William Lloyd's book, *Vincenzo Bellini: A Memoir*, was superseded by a detailed and substantial biography, written in English by a serious scholar.

In the summer of 1929 William took out a tenancy on The Grove, a fine but dilapidated 18th century royal hunting lodge. The Grove has now vanished, but it once stood at 89, Church Road, Upper Norwood. London and in November of that year George began his violin lessons. *'That was wonderful for me, because Albert Sammons wasn't teaching at the colleges then, he was just taking private pupils. For a good five years I studied with him. and I think I absorbed a great deal from that man which I didn't realise at the time. I honestly believe that his instinctive, freely expressive playing had a lot to do with the kind of music I began writing.'* Before he could begin his lessons with Sammons, George needed a good violin, and his father made enquiries with dealers and violin teachers for a suitable instrument. After one instrument was referred to Sammons for an appraisal, George wrote to his mother:

Dear Pussy , (George called his mother Pussy throughout his life)

I thought you might like to hear what Sammons says; he thinks it is a beautiful fiddle and would do very well; also, if it is a genuine Gugliano it is very reasonable, as one of his pupils bought one for £300 but he has heard of them going for £80 or so. If we do buy it, he advises us to get a guarantee.

I had Dad's letter this morning; I certainly don't think it has a small tone and as for it wearing out, good gracious it's only a little over 100 years old. I had fixed to see Mr Casey after Sammons' lesson yesterday only I was too late, so I sent him a letter just to let him know I hadn't run away! I am going again on Tuesday when I hope to see his other and also going to meet Bill and have lunch with him. Fortunately, the bow can be mended – for 10/6. So, there is nothing to worry about over that. I am joining the orchestra on Thursday having already seen John Fry – I have also chucked the Monday night business – Lebell seems to think I should be able to have more time with him in the morning. Just think of it I have been to town every day since I have been back - what chance is there of work! I have had one great piece of luck: the other day I was in a room at Trinity practicing when I noticed a manuscript on the table - - guess what it was! The song which won the prize I failed at! So, I looked at it and oh! (one now has to do a quick descending chromatic scale to express one's feelings!) You've never seem such bilge it went like this (unfortunately the rest of this letter and the song is missing.....)



Albert Sammons Replace with GLL signed picture

The Gugliano violin proved unsuitable, for whatever reason, but further enquiries through the family of Gladys Coombes led Will to a fine instrument by John Betts, which was once, according to a letter which came with the violin, the property of Lady Emma Hamilton. (The full story of that violin is told in a separate chapter.)

Helped by a recommendation from Albert Sammons, George entered

Trinity College of Music in 1929 at the age of 16 where he studied composition, orchestration and chamber music with Dr William Lovelock. He took lessons in harmony and counterpoint with Professor C.H. Kitson at the Royal College of Music, and composition with Professor Harry Farjeon, the youngest ever professor of composition at the Royal Academy. Farjeon, a contemporary of Bax, came from a theatrical and artistic family, his father being a novelist, his sister, Eleanor, a poet and his brother, Herbert, producer of *The Little Review*. George respected Farjeon greatly, not only for his composition but for his understanding and open-mindedness as a teacher who “*never tried to force a set of ideas*”. Harry Farjeon became an enthusiastic supporter and advocate for George

Lloyd's music, and they corresponded regularly. Of his time teaching George Lloyd, Harry Farjeon wrote:

After a year with Conway at Chichester, the boy came to London to study the violin with Albert Sammons and composition with me. I say composition, but actually I kept him mostly on counterpoint (He already was grounded in this – the year in Chichester had been well spent) with orchestration and composition gradually worming their way in. He gave a whole term to canon, and another to fugue. He wrote excellent fugues, theoretically correct and musically vivacious, and heartily despised them all. After three years he was fitted to try his wings unaided. At 18 he said good-bye to his professors and took himself in hand.

The relationship with Farjeon endured, and 10 years later, after the success of his first opera, *Iernin*, he wrote to George with an extended review and analysis of the work, pointing out the weaknesses as well as the strengths, and George acknowledged that Farjeon evaluation of *Iernin* was fair, honest and helpful. He clearly valued his time with Kitson also, because forty years later, when pianist John Ogdon came to George for lessons in composition, he started him at the very beginning by recommending that he should study Kitson's *Elementary Harmony and Counterpoint for Beginners*.

Even before the family had moved to London, between the ages of fifteen and seventeen, there were regular trips from St Ives to London. They went to the Old Vic at sixpence a time and in the summer to Covent Garden. **(Review opera programmes)** *'So I'd heard plenty of singing by the time I was 17,'* he told de Souza, *'that was the music I loved best - and I suppose it narrowed my mind in some way... That was music - and to hell with the rest of it'* By the time he was 18, George had a solid grounding in the Italian style of opera composition. *"My father was an opera aficionado and he knew an immense amount about opera- in particular all the early Italian writers – Cimarosa, 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 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.*

However it wasn't just that he loved these very early Italian operas - all Italian opera was grist to his mill and so while I was doing all my conventional studies 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 restoration play or an 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 it went. So, when it came to actually writing an opera, I knew a little bit about it. 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. 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. So, I just grew up believing that a decent opera had to have a lot of tunes in it. Even then it was becoming something of a rarity, because for quite a number of years operas hadn't had tunes in and so I just wrote my tunes. “

After three years of formal study, George set to work on composition, and made a flying start. Within a year he had written several fugues and his *Symphony in A* (25 minutes). A year later, in 1933, he had conducted his *Symphony in A* with the Bournemouth Orchestra and written more Fugues, several Canons, and two more Symphonies, one of which was broadcast by the BBC.

George's taste in this period was, by his own admission '*ultra-romantic*'. For BBC Producer Paul Hindmarsh, the first three symphonies '*reveal much serious endeavour*' as well as the influence of Sibelius and Tchaikovsky, and throughout his life the influence of his father's love of Italian opera was evident. In George's first symphony written in 1932, Verdi was '*audible in a vein of lyric nostalgia*' as Malcolm Macdonald had it; 60 years later, the waltz from the third movement of his Eleventh has unmistakable echoes of Puccini, so there is no denying the essential romanticism in his temperament, but in his early days that was seen as a virtue and not a vice, - in the colleges, among the orchestras and among the general public.

Romanticism was still acceptable, but there was a distinct preference for German Romanticism. Italian opera was unfashionable in England, at least in academic circles, and was considered the poor relation to the unassailable position of Wagner and German opera in the London musical scene of the period. Even in 1931, Francis Toye's ground-breaking book on the life of Verdi was considered mildly eccentric. As George was growing up in the 1920s and early 1930s, Lloyd father and son were out of step, although they were ahead of their time in their enthusiasm for Italian opera, "*We didn't make any decision about Italian versus German opera, we just knew that the Italian style was what we liked! When we moved to London, I took myself off to hear Valkyrie with great excitement. I thought that it was going to be a wonderful revelation. I thought*

'my poor Father, he didn't understand that' but I was going to understand it, you know, so I was expecting a tremendous revelation, it was going to start a whole new movement. I was about 16 or 17 and this was really going to start something new for me. Oh dear, that was one of my early disillusion... I found that I couldn't stand it!"

George's willingness to swim against the tide of fashionable musical opinion, even as a student, clearly owed much to his father's influence. That independence in the young composer was reinforced half a century later and their preference was vindicated when a taste for Italian composers became the dominant style of opera in London, but that shift did not do George any favours in academic circles. In the 1950's his stubborn refusal to abandon his "*long melodic line*" would result in his exclusion from broadcasts and concerts, but he shrugged it off. He had grown up believing that his judgement was correct, and that he would be proved to be correct.

- Footnote Only his first three symphonies survive from that period. In the 1970s, when George moved back to London to pick up the threads of his musical life which he had abandoned 20 years before, he mercilessly reviewed his early works and destroyed them all except for the first three symphonies. He did however retain the board bindings from some of these works, and although he scratched out the gilt lettering of titles so that the bindings could be used for other works, the titles are decipherable and are now the only evidence that these pieces ever existed. They include a *Fugue in D*, a *Fanfare and Fugue in D Minor*, a *Fugue in A for Orchestra*, a *Canon for Orchestra*.