Dear members and friends of the NW branch

Another excellent NW branch season has ended, another summer has now arrived (?) and it’s time for another Newsletter which I hope will serve to summarise some of the branch news and our various activities during the past year.

Sadly, in the New Year, we received news of the death, on New Year’s Eve, of our beloved and much-admired branch Patron, Michael Kennedy. He and Joyce have contributed significantly to the success of the branch over many years and, in addition, they have been close friends of the branch. Of course, we have expressed our condolences to Joyce and the family in their sad loss.

A Michael Kennedy Memorial Concert is to be held at the Royal Northern College of Music, in Manchester, at 7.30 p.m., on 5th October 2015. Details have been circulated to members. Booking for this concert opened on 29th July at RNCM Box Office telephone: 0161 907 5555.

Joyce has very kindly agreed to our request that she should now become our branch Patron but, on the clear understanding that we are inviting her to do so as a valued and respected member and friend of the branch, in her own right. We look forward to her continuing support.

With the help of several branch committee members, who have provided copy, I have attempted to cover all the branch meetings of the past season. I am very grateful to those members who have provided material (articles and photographs) which has made the full coverage possible. Their contributions are gratefully acknowledged and they are credited at the end of the articles.

As usual, we have had much variety in our meetings with academic talks and presentations; live music; a very special and much-enjoyed luncheon at the Alma Lodge Hotel in Stockport, in November 2014, to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the NW branch based in Manchester; an AGM, in January 2015, with added interest by way of light refreshments and music chosen by branch members; a very successful outing in May (organised by John Mawbey) to Skipton, Gigglewick (Morrison Chapel) and Settle; and an additional and equally successful outing to Liverpool, in June (organised by Ken Swallow and Geoff Scargill) to the Anglican Cathedral and a delightful evening performance of the Dream of Gerontius by the RLPO under Petrenko. We have another attractive programme of events planned for the 2015 -2016 season.

(D.L.J., Editor)

Elgar in Germany: Geoff Scargill, 18th Oct 2014

The first meeting of the season was well attended and we welcomed a few new faces. Most Elgarians are aware of Elgar’s admiration for the music of Richard Wagner. The extent of the latter’s influence on Elgar’s music remains open to debate but, in his thoroughly researched and excellently presented talk on “Elgar and Germany”, Geoff made a strong case.

Elgar, one of Hans Richter’s “gods”, along with Wagner, regarded himself not as an English composer but a European one. As Geoff said, “The trees sang his music, but not necessarily in English”! Looking more to London and Germany than to provincial Worcestershire, Elgar wanted the Worcester Philharmonic Society to open every meeting with Wach auf! aus Die Meistersinger. Although travel to the continent was not easy in those days, after their marriage in 1889 Edward and Alice started going to Germany and Bavaria regularly, including six visits to Wagner festivals in ten years. She spoke German well and Edward began to learn the language. On one occasion his attempts to ask directions to “the end of the line” resulted in a tram ride to a cemetery! At home he hung up a portrait of Wagner.

Turning to the influence of Wagner on his music, Geoff said the similarities are just too many to be mere coincidence, e.g. the closing bars of the Liebestod from Tristan und Isolde and the 2nd symphony, or Gerontius (“Go forth upon thy journey”) and Parsifal (Act 1 sc.i). Elgar swept aside English choral tradition, bringing in leitmotiven. He consulted analyses of Wagner’s operas, making his own cross-references of the leitmotiven. Both composers shared a love of legends perhaps, as Geoff suggested, as an escape from the increasing industrialisation of the time. The Black Knight, King Olaf, and Caractacus are all based on legends.

In 1902 in Düsseldorf, Elgar was called to the platform 20 times after a performance of Gerontius. But with the outbreak of WWI his reputation abroad was shattered; he was “tainted” by the German influence. After his death the decline continued. Only a few works (such as the Enigma Variations and the Cello Concerto) were regularly heard. However, in recent times the choral works have gained in popularity. There are currently seven Elgar Society members in Germany and it is hoped one day there will be a branch there.

Geoff’s excellently presented talk was well illustrated throughout with musical examples and he chose to end with a recording of Elgar’s arrangement of Parry’s Jerusalem. Given as an encore at a concert in Germany, the whole audience joined in the singing. It was a very moving and encouraging way to end a fascinating and thought-provoking talk.

NB.

Geoff referred to the on-line thesis by Laura Meadows: Elgar as a Post-Wagnerian Composer; a Study of Elgar’s assimilation of Wagner’s music and methodology [Durham University]
The luncheon this season was a special occasion for the North West Branch as it was held to mark the thirty years since the branch moved from Liverpool to be centred in Manchester. It was held at the Alma Lodge Hotel, in Stockport, which proved to be an ideal venue for this event. The occasion was marked by the presence of Steven Halls, National Society Chairman, as our guest speaker, and the Ellesmere Quartet (our “Quartet in Residence”) who played live chamber music to serenade us after our lunch and speeches. Fifty members and guests were present at the event and, in addition to our special guests already mentioned, we were delighted that our branch Patron, Michael Kennedy, and his wife, Joyce, were able to be with us, as on so many previous occasions. Sadly, it was to be Michael’s last attendance at one of our branch functions.

David Jones

Seated at the top table were: Michael and Joyce Kennedy, Steven and Elizabeth Halls, Geoff and Pam Scargill, Pat and Roger Hurst (Pat & Roger are seen in the background)

Elgar Society Chairman, Steven Halls, is seen here giving his after-luncheon speech. He spoke about the various works which Elgar composed during World War One.

All photographs of the Elgar Society’s NW branch luncheon were taken by David Jones