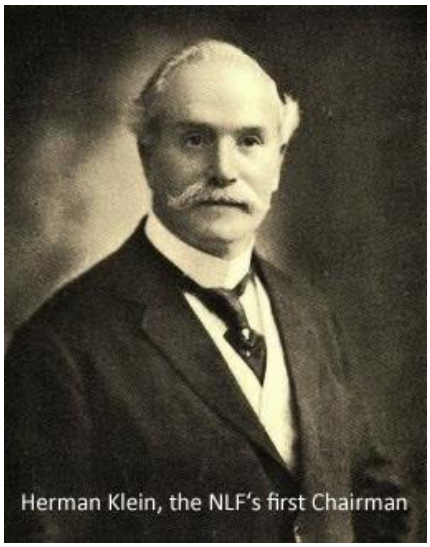
# NLF : THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS

## Packing 100 years into 400 words – a brief introduction


Herman Klein, the NLF's first Chairman

Our festival was founded in 1920 by a diverse group of North London musicians, led by prominent music critics, teachers and performers who objected to having to plead with the organisers of the Stratford and East London Music Festival (England's oldest, founded in 1882) to accept entrants from beyond their nominal boundaries.

With early support and expert guidance from internationally-renowned composers, performers and publishers, the new festival soon drew in 1200 (later up to 1900) entries a year, mainly for piano, choral and 'elocution' (now speech & drama) classes. Those entrants, in turn, brought along large family audiences, perhaps partly because few families, in those pre-wireless days, had access to high-quality music and drama at home.

Apart from a four-year break during World War II, a one-year gap in 1971 and the disruption wrought by COVID-19, the North London Festival has run continuously ever since, making 2025 its 100th season. The outside world is now vastly altered. It's not simply that old venues have vanished, nor that the balance between piano, string, woodwind, brass, vocal, choral and drama classes has shifted back and forth. Society is vastly changed: London's children no longer leave school at 14 to take up paid work; nor do today's middle classes rent a piano as evidence of social status. Recorded sound, albeit mostly vacuous, can fill our ears almost anywhere.

But any musician who has worked in a cross-section of London schools will tell you that worryingly few young children are being introduced, either at home or at school, to live-performed music of true artistic value. Where the parents are supportive, private music teachers and ABRSM examiners continue to have key roles in drawing out the talents of youngsters like the winners of our Premier competitions, who often go into the profession. To them, performance experience in a festival like ours is of huge value. But the key to turning an *ordinarily* musical child into an adult who will love and promote music life-long is not the anxious isolation of the exam room but the opportunity to perform in a less formal context to family, friends and even a few appreciative strangers, whether as a soloist or supported by the other members of an ensemble. That, for us, is just as important, and it is with those values in mind that we explore the changes of the past to help us plan the changes of the future.

***Read on to unpack our history***

# UNPACK OUR HISTORY – notes compiled by Rosemary & Jeremy Cook

**Each of the headings below examines a different aspect of NLF's history.**
To explore a different path, use the 'Return to Packing List' link at the end of each section.

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| **Section 2.4** | **Adjudicators** | Adjudicators are a key element of any competitive festival, needing to be experts not only in their own field but also in the subtle art of giving encouragement while identifying problems. |
| **Section 2.5** | **Competitors** | What motivates young people to enter, often in successive years? Is it the prizes? Is it the honour? Is it the experience? How have these changed? |
| **Section 3.0** | **Places** | Where have the all the competitions been held? Some of the venues now lie derelict or have been converted to other uses, so we have assembled some notes on their architectural history. |
| **Section 4.0** | **Pieces** | When and why did the use of compulsory test pieces fall out of favour, gradually giving entrants more choices for self-expression? |
| **Section 5.0** | **Prizes** | Unpack a century of cups, trophies, medals, certificates, cash-prizes and sponsors' vouchers. |

**Appendices**

**Selected syllabuses, etc**

These two links will take you to separate locations that contain much of the basic data from which this history was drawn.

# Section 1.0 Purposes

- *Why did competitive music festivals first emerge, and why do they still have value in a greatly changed world?*

**What is a competitive music festival?**

The phrase 'music festival' is ambiguous: it may mean either of two distinct types of event. Most music festivals are local promotions of concerts given by paid professionals, often of high international status. Their primary purpose is to draw in, inspire and educate paying audiences. Our North London Festival belongs to the other type. Its main purpose is to give performance opportunities, and supportive feedback from expert professional adjudicators, to performers who are still learning their craft, at all ages from primary school to music conservatoire. Some of these will eventually become professional musicians, but those who don't are just as important, because taking part strengthens their lifelong skills as amateur players, singers and listeners.

Audiences play a vital part in a competitive festival by giving the performers practical and emotional support – the audience is the key feature that differentiates these performances from grade examinations – but the focus is on the experience so gained. By contributing to the audience when they are not actually performing, the competitors also get to see the audience—performer interaction from both sides, and hopefully to understand it better.

> *It's in these fleeting moments that music lives in the hearts and minds of the audience – and the performer*
>
> Kotéche McIntosh: Emanuel Trophy, 1994

**Why did such festivals emerge?**

The ancient Welsh eisteddfod tradition may have been something of an inspiration for the earliest competitive festivals; but it does not by itself explain why such festivals popped up like mushrooms all over England between 1882 and 1907, by which time 70 of them were already affiliating into a Federation. There's probably no single answer, but three factors seem to have contributed.

***1. A spirit of progress***

The second half of the eighteenth century was a time of remarkable change, both at home in Britain and across its Empire. Disruptions to the material, social and intellectual environment were generally regarded as representing 'progress', in a collective spirit that remained stubbornly optimistic despite the

grit and grime. Music was no exception. The Royal Academy of Music had received its Royal Charter from King George IV, but Trinity College and the Royal College of Music were resolutely Victorian in their progressive, new-era outlook. Training young people to fill these conservatoires had to be a priority, and providing support and sponsorship for competitive music festivals would have been seen as a low-cost way of improving the musical skills of school-age children, as well as of those already embarking on professional training.

But the early founders of the competitive festival movement weren't themselves concerned with promoting professional skills: they saw a much broader role for music in the community. Workplace brass bands were emerging a means of giving shared pleasure and common purpose to many, as were village choirs, both sacred and secular, so the founders built on these innovations, striving to raise their standards of performance.

In doing so, they also created new audiences for fine music, especially in the major cities, drawing in people who had not until then had easy access to it, and improving their listening and appreciation skills. When the North London Festival was founded, and for many years afterwards, well over a thousand entrants would bring their friends and families to hear their performances.

***2. National pique***

The epithet 'A land without music' was coined by a German critic, Oscar Schmitz, in 1904; but he was not alone in denigrating England's musical culture. It's true that we had not produced any truly great composer since Purcell, but we had taken Handel and Haydn to our hearts, we had kept faith with the Viennese composing tradition, and we had continued to make music a vital part of our lives in homes, churches and opera-houses. Still, Schmitz's barb stung, and the need to prove its falsehood must have provided another incentive to those launching competitive festivals, particularly where they involved raising national standards of performance and composition.

***3. Provincial prosperity***

Among the many changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution and still being resolved in Victorian times was a great shift of middle-class wealth from the capital to the provinces, where agriculture had given way to manufacturing on a large scale. Mary Wakefield, one of the leading lights of the eighteenth-century Festival Movement, had a family background in banking in Cumbria, evidently based on this burgeoning industrial prosperity; and this, joined to a thorough musical education that had taken her across Europe, gave her the means to advance competitive festivals in her own area. Her contemporary Mary Egerton used her wealth and social status (her family was

descended from Henry VIII) to launch others in Yorkshire. London had to run to keep up. Although the Stratford and East London Musical Festival had led the way, opportunities for musical competition in other London areas remained quite limited until after World War II.

**The continuing value of competitive festivals in a changing world**

Our world has been radically changed by a host of factors, including two World Wars, the many Education Acts that preceded and followed them (particularly the Act of 1921 that raised the school-leaving age to 14 and changes encouraging formal education beyond 18) and the advent of radio, television and streaming devices, filling ordinary homes with sound, most of it vacuous.

So the purpose of competitive festivals has had to undergo some important adjustments. Audiences are now smaller and classes less dauntingly formal and prescriptive than they once were (see *Section 4.0 – Pieces*) but the need to introduce young people to live-performed music of true artistic value is, in a way, greater than ever, because so much music is now absorbed second-hand, with zero effort on the part of the listener. Active participation in live performance really is the key to turning an ordinarily musical child into an adult who will love and promote music life-long.

> *A musical competition festival is a place where the unfledged are just learning to spread their wings*
> Ernest Fowles, 1923

Finally, a minority of professional musicians will tell you that they disapprove of competitive music festivals, even if they themselves competed as children. Even the founders of the Festival Movement, Mary Wakefield and her mentor Henry Leslie, had reservations about the competitive aspect of the festivals they promoted – they shared a particular distaste for the award of money-prizes to competitors, which has now become commonplace because we no longer want to litter our mantelpieces – if indeed we still have them – with cups and trophies that are disproportionately costly to provide. So the element of competition, with helpful adjudication feedback and the award of certificates, is still there to motivate the performers to put in the hard yards of practice that will improve their skills; but if winning comes to dominate the performer's thinking then something has gone wrong. That is why, when you look at the publicity for the North London Festival today, you will see how the emphasis, particularly for the younger entrants, has shifted strongly away from competition and towards the wider benefits of active participation.

**Return to Packing List** — or read on about People

## Section 2.0 People

- *What do we know about the founders, administrators, committee and council members, adjudicators, competitors, prize-winners and audiences of the past, and how have their roles changed?*

The essence of any competitive music festival is its people: not just its core of professional musicians and volunteer administrators but also the children and adults who compete and the parents, spouses and friends who provide them with support. Over 100 years, the numbers of those run into tens of thousands, and we can only discuss changes over that time in general terms.

But we do have specific information about many of the key people who began and ran the North London Festival, those who adjudicated for it, and in some cases those who won prizes.

Some of it is quite detailed – for example, we have provided biographies for as many of the key people as we can – so we have divided our discussion into five secondary sections:—

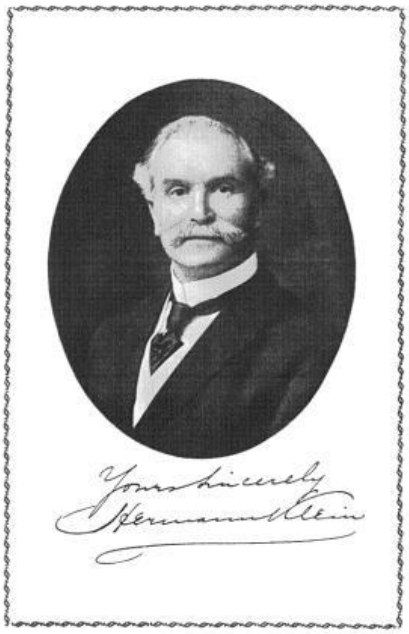
| | |
|---|---|
| 2.1 Founders | Chairman, Secretary & Executive Committee |
| 2.2 Presidents | Biographies of all five Presidents to date |
| 2.3 Chairs & Officers | Also, from 1972, Section Secretaries |
| 2.4 Adjudicators | Biographies of every adjudicator in a representative sample of years |
| 2.5 Competitors | A century of gradual changes in emphasis between ensemble and solo entries, and some recollections from past competitors |

**Return to Packing List** — or read on about Founders

## Section 2.1 Founders

- *In its early years, support came mainly in the form of subscriptions from Vice-Presidents and Musical Council members, plus endorsements from famous composers. But, as always, a few people did most of the work!*

**Mr Herman Klein**



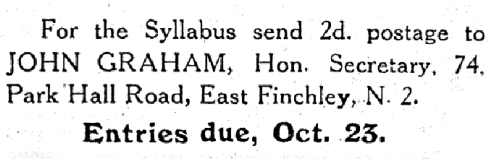
Herman Klein (23 July 1856 – 10 March 1934) was an English music critic, author and singing teacher.

He was born in Norwich into a Jewish family: his father an emigré from Latvia who taught foreign languages at the King Edward VI Grammar school there, and his mother the daughter of a shoemaker from the Vosges region of France who taught dancing. Herman(n) dropped the Germanic spelling of his name during World War I and was proud of his British citizenship and upbringing, although he remained a member of the West London Synagogue and married his second wife there.

Klein began his varied career at the Guildhall School of Music in London, where he taught singing using the methods of the Spanish pedagogue Manuel Garcia and helped to edit Garcia's "Hints on Singing", which he later revised and republished. In 1876, Klein took up musical journalism, writing regularly for The Sunday Times, The Musical Times and other journals. From 1901 to 1909, he lived and taught in New York City, where he was one of the first critics to take notice of the gramophone and was appointed musical adviser to Columbia Records: years later, as the influence of recorded music grew ever greater, he wrote regular articles on singing for The Gramophone.

So much is well-attested. What does not seem to be recorded, at least where it can be found online, is his motive for putting so much time and effort into founding the North London Musical Festival. We have no evidence of his prior involvement with any other such festival, although he may have been asked to adjudicate, for example at Stratford, and this could be how he came to know John Graham. But his value to the NLF's foundation was clearly related to the network of contacts he would have built up during his years of musical journalism: it would be hard, otherwise, to explain how this brand-new festival came to have 20 Vice-Presidents and 45 Council Members in its first year!

**Mr John Graham**


For the Syllabus send 2d. postage to JOHN GRAHAM, Hon. Secretary, 74, Park Hall Road, East Finchley, N. 2.
**Entries due, Oct. 23.**

If Herman Klein was the showman who drew all of North London's musical passers-by into his new fairground, then John Graham ran the steam engine that powered the carousels. Information about him, though, is hard to find. Apart from his home address, printed in the syllabus, we know nothing of his professional or personal life; not even his dates of birth or death. However, the importance of his role cannot be overestimated. The Executive Committee of February 1938 clearly agreed, as they decided that a Cup or Trophy should be awarded to perpetuate his memory. Presumably he had died in that year or in 1937.

We do know that John Graham had a longstanding belief in, and connection with, competitive music festivals. As early as 1902, an article that he wrote was published in the Musical Herald. Entitled 'In the Choir at the Coronation' (of Edward VII), it received fulsome praise in the Woodford Times: *"[I]t glistens with many striking points of philosophy that will give pause to the reader. There will be interest in it for years, perhaps reigns to come!"* Of its actual content there was, sadly, no mention, but we do learn that its author was already at that time *"the popular manager of the Stratford Musical Festival"*.

Four years later, in 1906, Graham resurfaced, billed as *"Secretary of Stratford Musical Festival"*, in a column of the Newcastle Daily Chronicle that was reporting on a meeting of the National Convention of Choirmasters, Schoolmasters and Music Teachers in Sheffield, where Graham had read a paper on *"Competitive festivals, and what they are doing for music"*. No fulsome praise this time: the dampening response from his host can be summarised as "Competition as an end in itself undermines more lofty ambitions, so where the true artistic spirit already exists there is no need to introduce it".

But Graham went on preaching his gospel around the country for many more years. We don't know for certain that he was still running the Stratford Festival in 1920, but we do have this comment in his signed 'Introductory': *"The committee working [at Stratford], instead of continuing to refuse entries from outside of their area, prefer to help North and North-West musicians to start their own Festival ... The Stratford Secretary and his Assistant offer their services freely."* As his Assistant was one James Graham, likely a close relation, it seems likely that he is referring modestly to himself. If so, then the many hundreds of requests for syllabuses and many hundreds of completed entry forms that he and James must have had to handle in that first year would have been a daunting extra workload, even though the two festivals seem to have been scheduled for different times in the year.

**The founding Executive Committee**

In the first year, the Executive Committee had 20 members other than its Officers. Though many of them must have made useful contributions at the planning stage, three in particular stand out as having, to our knowledge, done a real job of work during the festival itself, while a fourth was still tirelessly working for it 30 years later!

**Dr Harold E. Darke**, Mus.D. was on almost every 1920 list: Vice-President, Musical Council, Executive Committee and Adjudicator. The last of these roles involved two full days of concentration, written assessment and adherence to a rather rigid marking scheme (see Appendix 1-C). Short biographies of all the adjudicators for 1920 and selected later years can be found elsewhere (Section 2.4 – Adjudicators).

**Miss Agnes Jackson**, L.R.A.M., A.R.C.M also had a serious job beyond committee work, as one of three Official Accompanists covering the six days of the festival: a considerable responsiblity.

**Miss Gertrude Oldham**, L.R.A.M., A.R.C.M was another of the three Official Accompanists, and her staying-power is shown by the fact that she remained a member of the Executive Committee and, later, the festival's Hon. Assistant Secretary, until her death in 1943.

**Miss Lillibelle Gibson**, L.R.A.M. survived even longer. Although she was not one of the Official Accompanists in 1920, she took on that role later and continued in it until 1950.

**Return to Packing List** — or read John Graham's "Introductory" from the first North London Festival in 1920, on the following page.

## Introductory note to the very first NLF syllabus, in 1920

by John Graham (Hon. Secretary and Treasurer)

Competitive Festivals are no new thing; they are influential in many places. Stratford had the first in England; while in London only the North and North-West is without a Festival in its midst. Whether North London will be content to lag behind in this progressive movement is going to be put to the test. Former competition workers give this effort its benediction. And if instant expressions of goodwill from all sides, and numerous promises of active support, may be trusted, the new Festival now announced starts very auspiciously.

Singers and players resident here need no longer apply to be allowed to compete at the Stratford Town Hall. The committee working there, instead of continuing to refuse entries from outside of their area, prefer to help North and North-West musicians to start their own Festival, and have guaranteed the effort against loss to the extent of £100 *[worth about £3,800 in 2024]*. The Stratford Secretary and his Assistant offer their services freely; they will also add to the guarantee, and the Metropolitan Academy of Music, Mr. Herman Klein, and others are assisting the same fund.

The first Festival is bound to be the most expensive, because all the challenge prizes (shields and cups) have to be provided at once. Recognising this initial expenditure, the Association of Competitive Musical Festivals have promised a liberal grant from the Carnegie Music Fund, which is dispensed by them. Another enterprising body is the Federated Board of British Music Industries. The present writer, addressing their annual conference, pointed out the Festival poverty of North London, although it is the centre of the pianoforte trade. The challenge was taken up in a kindly spirit, and financial aid was promised. Music publishers are subscribing two guineas each: Ashdown, Augener, Chappell, Curwen, Elkin, Enoch, Novello, Joseph Williams, Anglo-French, Ascherberg *[hardly generous: worth no more than £80 each even now!].* Other subscriptions promised amount to about £50. A public appeal has not yet been made. About £100 more will be required for prizes.

You, dear reader, we now ask for help. Will you put honour upon music, if you love it, by being one of the first on the first list of founders of the North London Festival?

The artistic purpose of the movement, it is hoped, will always be uppermost, and free from financial limitation. In this work, idealism finds its opportunity: good music is set for practice in the home and studio, in school and church, in choir and concert room. The standard of performance is raised by the stimulus of competition, Many of us would never do any drudgery if there were no spur. Let us see the goal and we will struggle to reach it. Our teachers will look on and applaud; they will also give us of their best, to help us to win. If we gain no other advantage, that is worth while both for teachers and taught. Aim at the first prize, but remember that the competitor who obtains the most esteem is the good loser. Be a sport! Be a trier!

The Festival starts with a complete programme. It presupposes strong faith on the part of the committee. 1t is fortunate in its vice-presidents, nearly all of whom are resident in the district. At first, only musical leaders are announced. The general council also consists only of well-known musicians. Patrons of art, educationists, great names will doubtless be attracted when it is seen that the musicians themselves appreciate the value of these competitive festivals.

**Return to Packing List** — or read on about Presidents

## Section 2.2 Presidents

- *Once the NLF was established, it was important to have a figurehead, if only to impress the impressionable and present the prizes.*

The first North London Festival had no President, but its Founders assembled a very impressive list of no fewer than twenty Vice-Presidents (see Appendix 2-A), including such still-familiar names as Sir Hugh Allen, Sir Edward Elgar, Prof. Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, Dame Clara Butt, Prof. H. Walford Davies, Edward German, and Hamilton Harty, alongside others whose name would have been much more familiar to musicians of the time. After 1920, our first surviving records begin in 1931, by which time there was a single President We can but guess who may have filled that role in the intervening years.

**1931** (or earlier) **– 1956: President: Her Highness Princess Marie Louise**

Princess Marie Louise (12 August 1872 – 8 December 1956) was a granddaughter of Queen Victoria. She was born in Cumberland Lodge in Windsor Great Park, and was considered to be a member of the British Royal Family as well as a member, through her father Prince Christian, of the House of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augusten-burg. However, in 1917, during World War I, King George V decreed that the British Royal House would no longer be that of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha but that of Windsor, and ordered his many cousins and in-laws, who were British subjects, to discontinue the use of their German titles, styles, and surnames. From then on, Marie Louise became known simply as "Her Highness Princess Marie Louise".


Lafayette Studios

Her story is rather a sad one: in 1891 she had married Prince Aribert of Anhalt, but it is thought that their marriage was never consummated: it was annulled in 1900. The Princess never remarried, but instead devoted herself to charitable organisations and patronage of the arts – for which our festival must be singularly grateful. Her 84-year life spanned six reigns, and by the time she wrote her memoirs she had attended four coronations in Westminster Abbey: those of King Edward VII in 1902; King George V in 1911; King George VI in 1937; and Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

**1959—1965:** **President: Dame Myra Hess**

Dame Julia Myra Hess, DBE (25 February 1890 – 25 November 1965) was born in South Hampstead into a Jewish family that had originated in Alsace. The youngest of four children, she began her piano studies aged five, and progressed by way of the Guildhall School of Music to the Royal Academy, to which she won a scholarship in 1903, aged 12. She was still only 17 when she performed the fourth piano concerto of Beethoven under Thomas Beecham, and she had also played in Amsterdam under the baton of Willem Mengelberg by the time World War I put an end to European travel.


Carl van Vechlen

By 1922 Myra was thrilling New Yorkers instead, and remained in America for some years. But the 'defining period' of her career must be World War II when, with all of London's concert halls blacked out at night to avoid being targeted by German bombers, she organised almost 1,700 lunchtime concerts, continuing twice a week for six-and-a-half years without fail, even through The Blitz, and attended by audiences totalling over 800,000. Myra herself played in 150 of these concerts, and many promising young performers got valuable performing experience and exposure in this way, even though their fees were nominal.

For her contribution to maintaining the morale of the populace of London, King George VI created her a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1941.

Myra Hess had a wide repertoire, ranging from Domenico Scarlatti to novel works by her contemporaries, but was renowned for her interpretations of Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann and Brahms. She was forced to retire from public performance after a stroke in 1961, but she continued to teach key students (including Stephen Bishop Kovacevich) in her final years.

**1967—1982:** **President: Clifford Curzon, C.B.E., F.R.A.M.**


Colin Anderson

Sir Clifford Michael Curzon CBE (18 May 1907 – 1 September 1982) studied piano at the Royal Academy of Music, and later with Artur Schnabel in Berlin and Wanda Landowska and Nadia Boulanger in Paris. He toured regularly in Europe and North America, both in the 1930s and after theWorld War II.

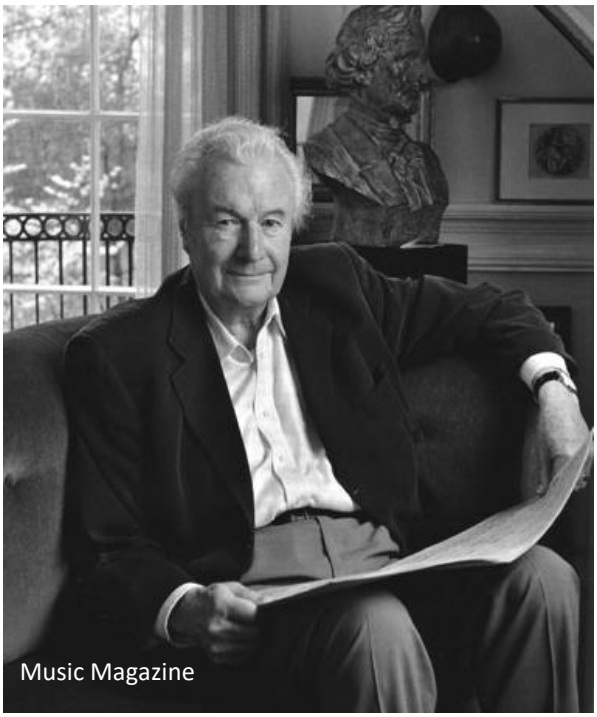
Born in Islington as Clifford Michael Siegenberg (his father was a Jewish antiques dealer who later thought it wise to change the family name), Clifford Curzon grew up close to the roots of our festival and may, indeed, have been involved in it as a young student, being only 13 when it began. He was still only 17 years old in 1924, when Henry Wood gave him his first Proms engagement as one of three student soloists for Bach's Concerto in D minor for three keyboards.

Although he made a glittering career in many pianistic genres, from the classical right through to the contemporary works of Ireland, Rawsthorne, Berkeley and Britten, by the time he became NLF's President, Sir Clifford was mainly celebrated for his performances and recordings of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Brahms in which, according to one influential biographer, *"he was unequalled for sensitivity and directness of manner, beauty of tone and an inner stillness."*

> *I had to prepare meticulously, knowing that both the panel and the audience would be closely observing every detail.*
>
> A recent winner of the President's Prize

Those who suffer from stage fright, and fear to play from memory in public, may take comfort from the fact that Sir Clifford shared their fears and always played with the music in front of him.

**1983—2013:** **President: Sir Colin Davis, C.B.E.**


Music Magazine

Sir Colin Rex Davis (25 September 1927 – 14 April 2013) studied clarinet at the Royal College of Music under Frederick Thurston (and in the same cohort as Gervase de Peyer); but his focus was always on conducting even though he was ineligible for the RCM's conducting class because he could not play the piano. After a decade in which he held several short-term conducting posts but also worked as an orchestral clarinetist, in 1959 he began his long association with the London Symphony Orchestra and, especially, with the works of Mozart, Berlioz, Elgar, Sibelius, Stravinsky and Tippett. From 1967, when he became chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, he was also deeply involved in the BBC Proms, reviving a tradition of putting on adventurous music that had lapsed a little since Henry Wood's day.

Opera was also a major element in Sir Colin's life, but from the viewpoint of our own festival his teaching roles were more relevant: he was President of the Landesgymnasium für Musik "Carl Maria von Weber" in Dresden, which is a Junior Academy for school-age children and associated with the important Hochschule of the same name, so he well understood the needs of talented school-age musicians. He also held the International Chair of Orchestral Studies at the Royal Academy of Music, whose Principal described him, after his death, as having "inspired a whole generation here, as did Henry Wood and John Barbirolli before him."

> *Competitions gave me clear goals to work towards, helping me stay focused and strive for higher standards.*
>
> A recent winner of the President's Prize

**2014—present:** **President: Robert Max, L.R.A.M., P.P.R.N.C.M.**

Conductor, solo and chamber cellist, teacher — in an exceedingly busy career Robert Max (b 7 February 1968) has filled all these roles, travelling widely on four continents. An Associate of the Royal Academy of Music, having taught there since 1992, he is also an Honorary Professor of the Rachmaninov Institute in Tambov, Russia. As cellist of the Barbican Piano Trio for more than 25 years, he has performed widely and made several acclaimed recordings, most recently of works by Taneyev with guest violist James Boyd. He was also the principal cellist of the London Chamber Orchestra for over twenty years, and coaches chamber music at MusicWorks.


Claude Darmon

*We wanted to practise some of our repertoire and it was overall a good experience. I didn't win any prizes but I featured very prominently in the promotional video for the next year!*

A competitor for the Singing Recital Prize

In conducting mode, Robert has directed the symphony orchestra at Royal Holloway, University of London, for over a decade, and the Covent Garden Chamber Orchestra and the Marryat Players – a chamber orchestra for young musicians – on many occasions. He has been Musical Director of Oxford Symphony Orchestra since 2006, and of North London Symphony Orchestra since 2017. He has also made regular visits to Romania to conduct the Arad and Oradea Filharmonic Orchestras.

**Return to Packing List** — or read on about Chairs and Officers

## Section 2.3 Chairs and Officers

- *Here you can find notes on some of the key people behind the scenes: the indefatigable men and women whose energy and commitment kept the NLF alive for 100 years. Section Secretaries, though not Officers, appear here too.*

The role of the Chair of the Executive Committee in any voluntary organisation is critical. A strong-willed Chair can enable the group to hold the line against external threats but, equally, can engender internal tensions with other strong-willed committee members, which has happened more than once in our festival! More than a dozen Chairs have been elected in the NLF's first 100 years, some holding the role for long periods and others effectively filling in. Here are some notes on those we know about, and on those who supported them (or tried!) during their time in office.

### **Herman Klein** (NLF Chair 1920–c.1928)

We have placed a biography of the NLF's first Chair on the Founders page, and there is nothing we can add to that to explain his motive for putting so much time and effort into founding the North London Musical Festival. But, as we noted there, his role in doing so was clearly related to the network of contacts that he would have built up during his years of teaching and musical journalism: it would be hard, otherwise, to explain how this brand-new festival came to have 20 Vice-Presidents and 45 Council Members in its first year!

Most of the donkey work of dealing with local agents, direct postal entries and adjudicators must inevitably have fallen on John Graham, as both Secretary and Treasurer, and apparently also the Secretary of the long-running Stratford and East London Musical Festival. If you have any leads on who took over those time-consuming roles in the years immediately following, and when they did so, do please let us know. We know is that Arthur W. Smith, Esq., had taken on the role of Hon. Secretary by October 1931 but not when he did so.

### **R Walker Robson** (NLF Chair c.1928–1934)

Dr. Robert Walker Robson (1877–1953) was born in Alnwick, Northumberland and studied in Newcastle and at the Royal College of Music, later gaining Mus.D. degrees in both Dublin and Oxford. By 1897 he had already begun a career as a church organist that continued until 1947, when he had completed 40 years in post at Christ Church, Crouch End, London. He taught widely, and his book *The Repertoire of the Modern Organist* (1925) can still be found second-hand, as can some of his compositions.

He seems to have been an effective manager, but to have come into conflict with his Secretary, Arthur W. Smith, a dedicated and hard-working man who remained in post for several years after Dr Robson had resigned. The Minutes of the Extraordinary Executive Committee Meeting on 28th February 1934 make for fascinating reading (here somewhat abbreviated!):

*Dr Walker Robson spoke at some considerable length upon his work in connection with the Festival since he took over the Chairmanship six years ago from the late Mr Klein. He went on to say that after the 1932 Festival he had a definite feeling that certain members of the Committee, Miss Oldham and Mr Smith the Secretary were ... not giving him the support and whole hearted co-operation which he felt were due to him as Chairman.*

*There was some discussion, Mr Smith, Miss Oldham and several members of the committee speaking ... A vote of Confidence in Mr Smith, the Secretary ...was carried unanimously. Dr Robson then left the room.*

[A motion was then proposed and carried unanimously] *"That this Committee are of the opinion that the charges of disloyalty against Miss Oldham and Mr Smith are unfounded and were undoubtedly due to overwork on the part of one or two persons".*

At the end of this meeting, Dr Robson was asked to remain as Chair for another year, but he declined to do so." Members expressed "*the hope that in spite of everything the welfare of the Festival should stand fast."* – a sentiment that holds just as true today.

## **Dawson Freer** (NLF Chair 1934–1935)

Dawson Freer (d. 1961) taught singing at the Royal College of Music, where the tenor Peter Pears was briefly his pupil in the first year of his NLF Chairmanship, and he had recently published a book, *The Teaching of Interpretation in Song.* There's a slightly longer biography of him on our Adjudicators pages, and he was also later a Vice-President.

As Chairman, Dawson Freer seems to have been easier to get on with than his predecessor, for whom he had often deputised. No-one resigned, and he was happy to hand his team over to his successor when his term of office expired.

## **Eric Thiman** (NLF Chair 1936–1938)

Eric H Thiman (1900–1975) took on multiple roles with the North London Festival, and his musical biography as organist, choirmaster and composer can be found on the Adjudicator pages.

When he took on the role of Chairman, the work of the Executive Committee in collectively deciding details of classes, regulations and adjudicators had hardly changed since the festival was founded. Classes were still "open" or "local", the area for the latter now being defined as *"North of the River Thames from*

*Walthamstow in the East to Ealing in the West".* But the possibility of another war was already in the air: the Secretary, Arthur Smith, *"reported that the total number of entries received in 1937 was 1,536 and that to date he had received 1,341 for 1938. The Committee congratulated him on this, as they considered It a very fine result in view of the exceptional circumstances of the recent crisis."* [The May Crisis of 1938 was a brief episode of international tension caused by reports of German troop movements against Czechoslovakia, which appeared to signal the imminent outbreak of war.] .

## **Reginald Paul** (NLF Chair 1939–1946)

It was Eric Thiman's suggestion, at an Executive Committee meeting in January 1939, that Reginald Paul should be the next NLF Chair. The 1939 festival did apparently take place as usual during the period known as the 'phoney war' before Hitler invaded Norway (the syllabus was certainly printed); but the 1940 festival did not.

We have placed a fairly full personal and musical biography of Reginald Paul on the Adjudicator pages. As Chairman, he was assisted by Vice-Chair Frederick Moore, who took over from him in 1946, and he served as Vice-Chair himself under two other Chairs until his death in 1974 so we can be confident of his total commitment to the NLF's aims. His first Secretary was the long-suffering and overworked Arthur Smith, who by then had made the case for having two assistant secretaries, Miss Gertrude Oldham (who died in 1943) and Mrs D.D. (Dorrie) Clayton, who later became Secretary in her own right and served in that role for at least 20 years, having a Memorial Cup named for her after her death – again, these were clearly very committed people. On top of that, of course, he had the unenviable task of getting the festival going again after the war, which cannot have been easy.

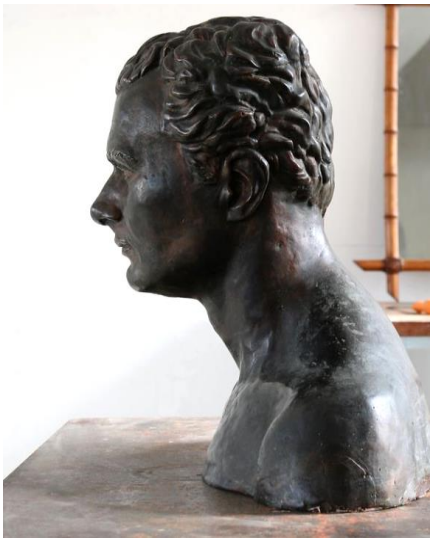
## **Frederick Moore** (NLF Chair 1946–1948)

Frederick Moore (d. 1952) taught piano at the Royal Academy of Music in London and edited and published collections of keyboard music from a variety of sources. His collections of *Gigues and Toccatas* and *Ayres and Dances (1931)* would originally have been for harpsichord, and he also published a volume of the *Harpsichord Music of Maurice Green* (1935), but as far as we know his own performances were primarily on the piano, for which he adjudicated at the 1933, 1946 and 1951 North London Festivals, and perhaps at others between.

Judging by the Minute Book entries from this period, he was an affable character – in 1933 he had been asked to adjudicate "the Babies classes" – and

he had been Vice-Chair to Dawson Freer, Eric Thiman and Reginald Paul, frequently standing in for them at meetings, so he and the rest of the committee would already have known each other well. Even after he had handed over the role to Charles Proctor, he still sometimes found himself chairing meetings, the last being in April 1952. Just five months later, though, "*the Chairman* [Charles Proctor] *opened the meeting by paying tribute to the late Frederick Moore, Esq., that great teacher, who kept in touch with this Festival up to the end and inspired everyone with his exemplary character and great generosity in all his words, thoughts and dealings.*"

## **Charles Proctor** (NLF Chair 1948–1960)



Charles Proctor was born in 1906 in East Finchley, in the heart of the NLF's territory, and studied at Highgate School, the Royal Academy of Music and (with Liszt's pupil and musical heir Emil Sauer) in Dresden and Vienna. His career thereafter was long and varied, opening as a concert pianist and continuing as conductor, organist, composer, teacher, lecturer, writer, examiner and adjudicator. At Trinity College of Music, generations of students gained not only from his training but, crucially, from the inspiration of his own example, instilling into them a deep dedication to the art of music. The Adjudicators list has a somewhat longer biography.

Charles Proctor was deeply involved with the North London Musical Festival at least by 1939, when our records begin, and he was Chairman for twelve years from 1948, during which time over 20,000 entries were made to the festival's annual competitions, reflecting the smooth operation, under his steady chairmanship, of a strong team: Dr Eric H. Thiman was his Vice-Chair and the redoubtable Mrs D.D. Clayton was his Secretary. (Although Mrs Clayton never, ever, used her forename on any of the many documents she signed, the Dorrie Clayton Memorial Cup gave away her secret!). The bust shown here was the work of his wife Rosemary Rennie, who was an artist and sculptor as well as a pillar of support.

## **Dennis Dance** (NLF Chair 1960–1970)

25th June 1960: *"The Committee then unanimously decided that Mr Dennis Dance should be their Chairman and Mr Reginald Paul their Vice-Chairman for the next period of three years. Mr Proctor thanked the Committee for their support during his four terms of Office and assured Mr Dance that he would have a happy time as Chairman."*

We can find no records from which to construct a biography of Dennis Dance. We know from his post-nominals that he was a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music and also of the Guildhall School of Music, where he seems to have done most of his piano teaching, to judge by the number of pianists who report studying with him there. Nothing untoward seems to have occurred between his election to the post in 1960 and the end of our meeting records in 1968, so presumably he did indeed have a "happy time". He had adjudicated for piano classes in 1946 and did so again in 1968 and probably on other occasions, too.

So it's purely by way of amusement, rather than useful information, that we reproduce this mealy-mouthed report by "F.B." in the Musical Times of 1 May 1928, when Dance and his piano duet partner must have been quite young: *"A recital for two pianofortes was given by Miss Joan Davies and Mr. Dennis Dance with some success. Neither player could be described as master of his instrument. But their earnestness, their determination to 'make good,' their modesty and sincerity, made ample amends for whatever flaws could be noted in the performances. In any case these were neither numerous nor serious, and one felt that experience alone is needed to give finish and maturity to their very promising efforts."* Well, what are music critics for, if not to entertain?

## **Mrs Frank (Joyce) Britton** (NLF Chair 1972–1974)

Mrs Frank Britton seems to have taken over the Chair after some kind of collapse in the administration – there was no festival at all in 1971, and for 1972 and 1973 we have only draft syllabuses bearing her name as Chair and Raymond Paul (a previous Chair) as her Vice-Chair. The numbering of the festivals that follow implies, however, that those festivals did take place.

It seems safe to assume that "Mrs Frank Britton" is the "Joyce Britton" who appears in the Executive Committee listing for 1975, when Emanuel Cedar took on the chairmanship. Otherwise, we can find nothing about her, although her husband was an accomplished pianist, well-known in Streatham, for whom the top piano prize of the festival was later named.

## **Emanuel Cedar** (NLF Chair 1975–2000)

Emanuel 'Manny' Cedar was born in Holborn in 1916 and died in Waltham Forest in 2000, aged 84. He was not, it seems, a professional musician – we can find no record of his occupation – but he had entered festival competitions as a young pianist and became a member of the NLF Council in 1960, rising to the position of Chairman in 1975. A short obituary in the 2002 NLF Syllabus tells us that he "worked very hard behind the scenes supporting the Festival in several ways in addition to leading the Executive Committee", which probably means that he was responsible for much of the recruitment of new members, donors and sponsors over that period, as well as overseeing the day-to-day running of the festival. The prestigious Emanuel Trophy Piano Competition to which he gave his name in 1985 still attracts entrants from all over the country who have won prizes in other local competitions; and some of those competitions make a point of saying, in their own advertising, that their winners will be put forward for our Emanuel Trophy list.

Manny worked with a long series of Vice-Chairs (four), Secretaries (three) and Treasurers (six) over his long period of office, all making key contributions to the festival's success.

## **Rachel Douglas** (NLF Chair 2004–2009)

Rachel Douglas (BMus (Lond) and amateur cellist) founded and ran Frederick Phelps Ltd, the violin dealers in Kentish Town North London, until her retirement in 2004. Retirement gave her more time to devote to the Festival that she had always supported. But beyond that, in her working life she had been particularly keen to encourage children and young people who showed enthusiasm and to ensure they had suitable instruments on which to perform, so she had built up extensive contacts with stringed instrument teachers, professors and performers in the London area. During her time as Chair these contacts helped her to extend and reinvigorate the stringed instrument classes, introducing high level competitions with donated prizes aimed at music students, as well as inaugurating composition classes and reviving and extending the Speech & Drama side of the Festival. Her pleasure, she tells us, was always in seeing how individual young students developed year by year, and hearing their performances.

## **Virginia Burdon-Cooper** (NLF Chair 2010–2015)

Virginia was born in 1943 in Radlett, Hertfordshire. She trained as a flautist at Trinity College, London (where she was a contemporary of Janice Twiselton, our long-time Administrator and Piano Section Secretary), and she tells of many happy years after that, playing in light operatic shows and orchestras. For many years, Virginia both played in and managed the Forest Philharmonic Orchestra under the batons of Frank Shipway and, latterly, Mark Shanahan. During that time, she made contact with many professional players of strings as well as wind instruments, which helped her to find marvellous adjudicators when she took over the role of Instrumental Section Secretary for the NLF in 1997 on the retirement of Peggy Page, who had been stalwart in that role since 1972. The section she inherited was, in fact, in some danger of collapse: it had never been anything like as strong as Piano or Singing, and by 1997 its competitions were receiving barely enough entries to run for two evenings and a Saturday morning, the winner of each class receiving just a medal and a certificate.

*"To the shock of the executive committee"*, Virginia writes, *"I suggested that cash prizes and vouchers from music shops and sponsors would increase our entry numbers"* and from that point onwards, throughout her tenure as Section Secretary while Rachel Douglas was Chair, and then during her own period as Chair, the number of solo instrumental entries steadily increased, partly as a result of new conservatoire-level competitions, sponsored by London businesses specialising in fine instruments, some of which are still sponsoring our Premier competitions today. We discuss elsewhere (*Section 4.0 – Prizes*) the tensions that can arise if career-focused Premier classes are seen to take precedence over junior classes, but in this case both ends of the ability spectrum in instrumental playing have since grown.

## **Adrian Pilbeam** (NLF Chair 2016–2019)

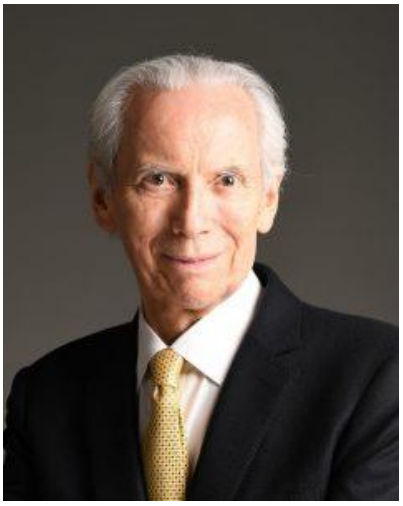
Adrian, another professionally trained flautist, took over the chairmanship of NLF on Virginia Burdon-Cooper's retirement; but he had to step down during a difficult time for the festival when, as had happened before, there were some internal tensions. Here is the LinkedIn profile that he wrote in that period:

An independent Music practitioner, administrator and teacher with over thirty years' experience in private tuition, class teaching, and department management. Also a well organised subject leader coordinator and professional events manager In addition to teaching, currently Chairman to the North London Festival of Music Drama & Dance, leading a team of motivated, dedicated and committed professionals in providing a platform in the performing arts for people of all ages through competitions, concerts & masterclasses.

At the end of 2022, Adrian suffered a serious illness that kept him in King's College Hospital's ICU for over 50 days. An article about music therapy on the KCH News website quotes him thus: *"I was fit and active before my illness but, after coming out of ICU, I had to re-learn everything. I couldn't hold a cup ... these music therapy sessions are helping me to rebuild it. I didn't know if I'd be able to play an instrument again, and here I am playing the piano. Music has been part of my life since I was five years old, and I don't think I could face the road to recovery without it."* We wish him all the best in his recovery.

## **Frank Wibaut** (acting Chair, 2020–2022)

Frank is an international pianist and recording artist who teaches in more than thirty countries. He has been Professor of Piano at both the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy, where he also became Head of Postgraduate Performance Studies. He has also been an adjudicator for many national and international competitions. His performing repertoire extends to 67 concerti, which he has played with all the major British orchestras and many others throughout the world. As soloist and also as chamber musician, he has made many recordings. In 1989, the RAM honoured Frank with its highest award, the Hon. RAM, for his outstanding contribution and service to music worldwide.



Frank took over the chairmanship of NLF at a very difficult time, right at the start of the period in which COVID-19 disrupted the musical life of the whole world, and especially of countries such as Britain where lockdowns and distancing rules were arbitrarily and intermittently imposed by government, making long-term planning impossible. His calm advice and support was an key factor that helped the festival to change, survive and plan a way forward in an increasingly online world where musicians will need Information Technology skills as well as their traditional ones.

## **Rosemary Cook** (acting Chair, Secretary and Section Secretary, 2023–2025)

Rosemary, the current lynchpin of the North London Festival, represents an important aspect of the way in which competitive festivals are being required to change to keep pace with the world around them: her professional career was as an IT specialist and Systems Analyst, not as a musician. Rosemary has,

though, been a keen amateur viola player ever since she was first recruited into a children's quartet at Fitznells Manor by Vivienne Price, who later founded the National Children's Orchestras. Since then, she has played over 800 different orchestral works, over 500 of them as Principal Viola in a ridiculous number of different amateur ensembles, thereby making contact with a large number of other string players, both amateur and professional.

Since 2016, Rosemary has been on the Executive Committee of the NLF and a Section Secretary (currently covering for several major sections owing to a lack of volunteers). Since the 2023 Festival, as well as being Secretary and dealing with much of the IT work, she has also been acting Chair, because a new Chair with suitable credentials has not yet been found.

**At the time of writing, it would take only one or two more straws to break the backs of the few people who are sharing this heavy administrative load. The NLF could then collapse entirely, despite the valued work of its other officers, committee members and helpers. If you are not already actively engaged with the festival, *please* help to take some of the load from their backs: there are many ways to do it. Just contact *enquiriesNLF@outlook.com***

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## Section Secretaries/Administrators

From 1972 onwards, entries were mailed to Section Secretaries, rather than to the Festival's overworked Hon. Sec., who had previously had to pass them on to the relevant Selection Committees. These days, Section Secretaries play a vital role in the running of the NLF that goes well beyond receiving the entries, which are now made on-line. They are responsible for appointing the expert adjudicators needed for their own section, and they are normally on hand to supervise each competition, to ensure that competitors follow the rules, and to provide constant and instant support for those adjudicators. Historically, many Section Secretaries (but not all) were also members of the Executive Committee, and this continues to be the situation today, although they have recently been renamed Section Administrators.

**On the next page is a list of their names and tenures since the role began.**

Those in post at the time of writing are shown in bold – and the festival is actively recruiting for more, to save those we have now from having to cover multiple roles. After the list, you can find biographical notes on those in post and a few others who have left us enough information to make that possible.

| Name | Years | Section(s) managed |
|---|---|---|
| Mrs J. Corbett | 1972-1973 | Singing, Choirs |
| Dinah Brooks | 1974-2000 | Singing, Choirs |
| Tess Gregory | 2002-2005 | Singing, Choirs |
| Adrian Pilbeam | 2010-2017 | Singing, Choirs, Orchestras to 2017, Wind/Brass |
| Rebecca de Coverley-Veale | 2018, 2021 | Singing, Choirs |
| Samuel Swinnerton-Woolf | 2019 | Singing, Choirs |
| Zoe South | 2023-2024 | Singing, Choirs |
| Patrick Richmond | 2006-2007 | Choirs, Organ |
| Paresh Amin | 2008-2009 | Choirs, Organ |
| Mrs M. Chaffer | 1972-1982 | Piano |
| Sara Medina | 1983-2014 | Piano |
| **Janice Twiselton** | **2015-2025** | **Piano** |
| E.J. Howard | 1977 | Organ |
| Michael Keyte | 2003-2005 | Organ |
| Peggy Page | 1972-1981 | Instrumental |
| | 1989-1996 | Instrumental |
| Bertha Lishak | 1982-1987 | Instrumental & Orchestras |
| Virginia Burdon-Cooper | 1997-2015 | Instrumental inc Harps; Strings alone from 2014 |
| | 2006-2010 | Singing |
| **Rosemary Cook** | **2016-2025** | **Strings** (shared)**, Chamber Music, Ensembles, Choirs,** |
| | **2025** | **Singing, Recorders, Wind/Brass, Sp/Drama** (shared) |
| **Liz Partridge** | **2024-2025** | **Strings** (shared) |
| Helen Sharp | 2014-2016 | Harps |
| Helen Leitner | 2017-2021 | Harps |
| Cat Gray | 2012-2013 | Recorders |
| **Keziah Thomas** | **2022-2025** | **Harps** |
| Lydia Conway | 2014-2015 | Recorders |
| Kathleen Benning | 1972-1981 | Composition & Musicianship |
| Iris Macer | 1982-2000 | Composition & Musicianship / Solo Singing |
| Alison Cox | 2009-2010 | Composition |
| **Graham Bennett** | **2011-2025** | **Composition** |
| Thelma Tillaney | 1972, 1976 | Speech |
| Joyce Howard | 1972-1977 | Dancing / Speech |
| Mrs M. Jobson | 1978-1983 | Speech & Drama |
| Beryl Foster | 1984-1998 | Speech & Drama |
| Clare Fischer | 2001-2002 | Speech & Drama |
| Trudy Keyte | 2003-2005 | Speech & Drama |
| Frances Glynne | 2007-2017 | Speech & Drama inc Groups from 2017 |
| Gabrielle Maddocks | 2013-2016 | Group Speech & Drama |
| Daniel Collins | 2020-2024- | Speech & Drama |
| **Juliet Cohen** | **2024-2025** | **Speech & Drama** (shared) |
| Kim Protopapa | 2006-2010 | Dance |
| Alison Soule | 2013-2014 | Dance |
| Joanne Mason | 2015 | Dance |

## Former Section Secretaries

Biographies of **Adrian Pilbeam, Virginia Burdon-Cooper** and **Rosemary Cook** appear in the main sequence of Chairs and acting Chairs.

**Daniel Collins** (Aug 1970–Apr 2024) grew up in the Orthodox Jewish community of Leeds, studied Business and Leisure Management at Farnborough College of Technology, and rose through a series of marketing posts at the *Jewish Chronicle*, *Financial Times* and *Time Out* before striking out as the founder-director of his own magazine distribution business. Does this sound like the career of a self-proclaimed shy person? *"As somebody who participated in Festivals as a shy teenager and who found my voice through standing on a stage"*, he later wrote, *"I know the life skills that it can give, whether that be to become a young actor or to give you the skills to stand up and speak in later life."* In his own later life, Dan was not shy.

Dan took on the role of Section Secretary for Speech & Drama at the NLF in May 2019, alongside a similar role for the Watford Festival of Music, Speech & Drama. He portrayed both to his colleagues with the infectious enthusiasm that made him so effective in these roles: *"[Each] is a friendly, motivating occasion where our main concern is always the young competitors. We welcome budding poets, verse speakers, musical theatre performers, actors, prose readers or public speakers from all over North London and from a diverse range of backgrounds. The festival aims to give our young performers confidence by using only the most positive of adjudicators. I love seeing the confidence they get from the experience. It's amazing to see them get better and better each year. Then sometimes I am privileged to watch performances so breath-taking that you know you are witnessing the beginning of something very special. Whatever path our performers choose I hope that we helped them with an extra touch of confidence to reach for the stars."*

"*Wow! 200 young performers, one day and what great talent! Thanks to all the sponsors and volunteers who made The NLF Speech & Drama section such a success yesterday [Autumn 2023]. Let's do it all again next year! "* But, to the great and sustained shock of his family, friends and colleagues, he couldn't. As his wife Lisa wrote in the days following his sudden and completely unanticipated death: *"The world is a sadder place without Dan in it."*

**Sara Medina** (her stage name: she was born Shirley Whittle) began learning the piano, aged five, with Lillibelle Gibson, who had been a member of the North London Festival's first Executive Committee in 1920 and would continue to be one of the Festival's official accompanists until 1950 – so the Festival was in little Shirley's blood from the start: indeed, we know that she won a Challenge Cup, aged 7, at Archway Central Hall. As a teenager, she won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music's Junior Department and, before too long, she had graduated from the RCM and won a competition to play before Princess Elizabeth, her future Queen (this, therefore, was before 1952).

In 1982, when Sara was well established as a concert pianist and teacher, the NLF's Piano Secretary resigned without warning (this must have been Mrs M. Chaffer) and Sara was asked to help with the 1983 Festival. Having reluctantly agreed to a job-share with another piano teacher, she soon found herself doing the whole job and continued in the role for the next thirty years, during which she used her contacts to bring in Sir Colin Davis as President and had major roles in launching two of the Festival's most prestigious piano competitions, the Emanuel Trophy and the Appelbe Prize. Even after her retirement in 2014, she continued to sponsor a competition prize until her death in February, 2025. A more comprehensive biography can be found among the Appendices.

## Section Administrators in 2025

**Graham Bennett** (Composition)

Graham was born in Edinburgh in 1973 and began his musical education at the age of nine studying piano, theory and composition at the Yehudi Menuhin School, the Royal Northern College Of Music and the Royal Academy Of Music in London where he obtained his BMus and LRAM teaching qualifications. After graduating, Graham pursued a successful career as a concert pianist and chamber musician performing extensively in the UK and abroad.

In 2001 he studied for a PGCE at the Institute of Education, University of London to obtain Qualified Teacher Status, which enabled him to broaden his teaching experiences working with young students in mainstream schools. In 2008 he created his own publishing company 'The Music Master Publications Ltd' writing a variety of educational books that embrace the enjoyment of discovering music and the realisation of making music.

Graham has been an important part of the North London Music Festival for nearly 20 years, adjudicating and managing the Composition Section of the festival. As a composer, he has written and published many solo and chamber works, including a piano concerto, piano trio, violin sonata, orchestral tone poem, piano and violin suite, bagatelles for flute, trumpet and piano, leyendas for solo piano and most recently a violin concerto. Graham also sponsors the North London Music Festival each year by offering some of his published books as competition prizes for the winners of each class.

**Juliet Cohen** (Speech & Drama) – biography to follow

**Rosemary Cook** (see above)

**Liz Partridge** (Strings) – biography to follow

**Keziah Thomas** (Harps) – biography to follow

**Janice Twiselton** (Piano) – biography to follow

**Return to Packing List** — or read on about Adjudicators

## Section 2.4 Adjudicators

- *Adjudicators are a key element of any competitive festival, needing to be experts not only in their own musical or dramatic field but also in the subtle art of giving encouragement even while identifying problems.*

We have not even tried to count the adjudicators whose names appear in our records, which in any case are incomplete. Over the 100-year span of the NLF, there must have been well over 1000 adjudication 'slots', although the same names sometimes recurred. Here we have attempted to give a flavour of the many men and women who have taken on this tricky role over the years, taking a sample every 12–15 years as the generations have passed by.

### 1920 – at the Northern Polytechnic Institute, Islington

**Frederick Corder** (1852–1932) was a Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music, where his pupils included Granville Bantock, Arnold Bax, York Bowen, Alan Bush, Eric Coates, Benjamin Dale and Harry Farjeon – quite a roll of honour, although his opposite number at the Royal College, Charles Villiers Stanford was able to counterclaim credit for Ralph Vaughan Williams, John Ireland, Gustav Holst and Frank Bridge! Corder was also co-founder and first chairman of the Society for British Composers. He had been born in Hackney and schooled in Blackheath, so he was a London man through and through. There's a short talk about him and a photograph, here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2L-N4TZ0nfw

**Harold Darke** (1888–1976) was an organist, choirmaster and composer who grew up in North London, studied at the Royal College of Music, and later gave 1,833 lunchtime organ recitals over a 50-year term as organist of St Michael's Church Cornhill. The year before this 1920 festival he had founded a choir there, the St Michael's Singers, which he would conduct until 1966, making a point of championing the work of contemporary composers such as Vaughan Williams and Parry; and he was also a professor at the Royal College of Music for over 60 years.

**Ernest Fowles** (1864–1932) was a pianist, pedagogue and the author of an important little book entitled "Musical Competition Festivals" (1923). In this, he set out with style, humour and clarity all the reasons for having such festivals and all the precautions that need to be taken to ensure that they achieve their proper aims, with parents, children, teachers, adjudicators and audiences all

working together to promote true musicianship in the young. Although his focus was on pianism, Fowles had also founded, as a young man, the prestigious and influential series of British Chamber Music Concerts that took place in the small hall of the Queen's Hall between 1894 and 1899.

**Elsie Horne** (1870–1947) was a pianist/composer, best remembered for having transcribed several of J.S. Bach's works for performance on two pianos. She must have had a much wider repertoire, though, because she stood in for Ferruccio Busoni as one of several star soloists in the farewell concert for singer Adelina Patti that took place in 1906 in the Royal Albert Hall, with Royalty present. In 1950, a memorial prize was created in her name by the Society for Women Musicians, for a ten-minute composition for piano solo by a member of the Society.

**Granville Humphreys** (1866–1944) was a very busy man: he taught singing and voice production at the Royal Academy of Music and at least two other colleges; he conducted two choirs, including one bearing his name; and he was organist of the Wesleyan Church in Leeds and linked to the South London Wesleyan Mission. He also found time to write books on singing, to compose choral music and part-songs, to organise competitions and concerts, and to be active as an adjudicator.

**Hugh S. Roberton** (1874–1952) was a Scottish composer and, after founding the Glasgow Orpheus Choir in 1906, became one of Britain's leading choral-masters. He had been largely self-taught – from age 21 he was managing the family funeral business and making music in his spare time – but his highly-disciplined choir, whose repertoire ranged across folk song, madrigals, baroque and romantic works and Russian Orthodox chant, had no equal in Britain. Roberton was a Fabian socialist, a pacificist and a friend of Ramsey McDonald, and also wrote a couple of plays and some humorous essays.

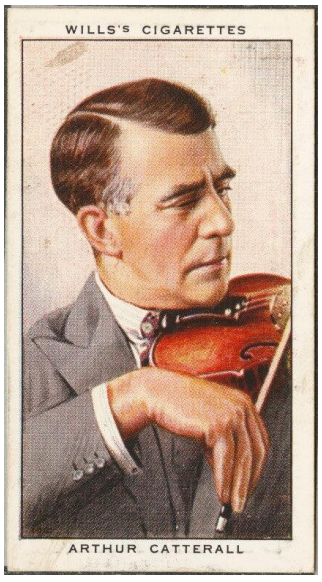
**Katie Thomas** (d. 1936?) was an elocution teacher whose adjudication day in 1920 spanned both singing and elocution classes: many such teachers were also singers and worked with students of opera as well as of drama. In 1936, the Royal Academy of Music inaugurated a Katie Thomas Memorial Prize , which was first awarded to an elocution student there on 21 July 1938.

## 1932 – at the St Pancras Public Halls, Kentish Town

There were thirteen adjudicators on this occasion, partly because there were now more classes for string-players and orchestras, although pianists and singers still vastly outnumbered them.

**Eve (Evangeline) Acton-Bond** (1884–1939) and her husband Acton Acton-Bond (yes, really) were both Professors of Elocution at the Royal Academy of Music and later co-authored "The Modern Reciter: Test Pieces" (1937). Eve's method of 'euchorics', combining vocal and gestural exercises based on eurhythmics, was designed to give children a greater appreciation of the metre and emotive expression of poetry, which must have made her an excellent choice for this adjudication role. Their son Brandon also became an elocution teacher and, later, a BBC producer. One wonders what they talked about at home.

**Clive Carey** (1883–1968) was an English baritone, singing teacher, composer, opera producer, folk song collector and all-round "stylish gentleman". He had been to excellent schools and became an organ scholar at Clare College, Cambridge, but it was his *"baritone of wide compass and attractive quality"* (The Times, 1907) that set the course of his life. Before World War I he was active in the folk-music revival, collecting songs and dances in Sussex, Essex and Oxfordshire; and after his military service he directed operas under Lilian Baylis at the Old Vic and Sadlers Wells, himself taking on such roles as Papageno and Don Giovanni. In parallel, he was teaching at the Royal College of Music where he would later become director of the Opera School. You can see and hear him in folk-song mode here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysy8ju1FO_U




**Arthur Catterall** (1883–1943) had a lowly start in Preston but was lucky in his education and in being taught the violin, while still a schoolboy in 1895, by the Russian virtuoso Adolph Brodsky at the Royal Manchester College of Music. By 1907 he was himself a professor there, and also leader of the Hallé Orchestra, where he stayed until 1925. He often travelled to London, leading the Queen's Hall Orchestra under Sir Henry Wood and taking solo roles, including the English premiere of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's Violin Concerto. He was prominent, too, in the chamber-music world of his time, and string-players will be fascinated to hear the extreme degree of *portamento* he chooses to use when playing César Franck's A major Violin Sonata with William Murdoch in 1923, although his style, though still dated to modern ears, is a little different in Mozart with Hamilton Harty, also in 1923: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4lFs111dRYk and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0K8MhYNEwU

**Edgar T. Cook** (1883–1953) was an organist, choirmaster and composer who became famous for his lunchtime organ concerts broadcast on the BBC in the 1930s (the era of this festival) and 1940s. He had begun his career as a church organist in his native Worcestershire in 1898, and in 1904 became assistant

organist at Worcester Cathedral. After winning an organ scholarship to Queen's College, Oxford he became organist and choirmaster at Southwark Cathedral, where he remained until the end of his life. He was made CBE in 1949, became Vice-President of the Royal College of Organists and was also a professor at the Royal College of Music. At the time of his death he was still fully active at Southwark, preparing his choristers for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

**Stanley Chapple** (1900–1987) became an operatic conductor at the City of London School (possibly his own former school) at the age of 19, and was ready to take on the London Symphony Orchestra two years later. By the time of this festival (1932) he had appeared as a guest conductor with the Berlin Philharmonic, and he was soon to receive similar invitations from Vienna, the Hague, and Warsaw. Later, when war broke out in 1939, he was already in America and he remained there for the rest of his career, dividing his time between the National Symphony in Washington DC and the Boston Symphony in Massachusetts, where he collaborated with Serge Koussevitzky to create the Tanglewood Music Center, having Leonard Bernstein among their first students. Chapple remained in America after the war, revitalizing Seattle's musical culture and then returning to Washington. When he retired in 1971, he took on a small retirement project, founding Seattle's Musicians Emeritus Symphony for retired musicians, which he proceeded to conduct for 14 years.

**Elsie Chester** was an actress who later taught elocution at the Academy of Dramatic Art, later to become RADA. There seems to be no online record of her background or her dates, but she was already playing the part of the motherly Mistress Page in Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor* at the Shakespeare Theatre, Liverpool. in December 1900. In reviewing the play, the influential critic J.T. Grein wrote: *"Miss Elsie Chester—an actress of more than ordinary gifts—as the Mistress Page was entirely in touch with the character. Her gaiety is spontaneous, she knows naught of stage or public ; while donning the picturesque clothes of the time she slips into the part, and for the time being Miss Elsie Chester is merged in Mistress Page. That is what I call acting."*

**Thomas Dunhill** (1877–1946) was a pianist/composer, born in Hampstead, who was writing operettas even before he entered the Royal College of Music, aged 16. He later won a scholarship to study with Charles Villiers Stanford, where his classmates included Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst and his lifelong friend, John Ireland. He became a professor at the RCM in 1905, and he also taught at Eton College, examined for the Associated Board and regularly adjudicated at festivals like ours. He also promoted concerts in London in which chamber music by English composers featured prominently. Unlike his RCM contemporaries, though, Thomas Dunhill's own compositions are rarely heard in the concert hall. He wrote operas, a symphony, chamber music and many

solo instrumental pieces, some of which are now being revived in the recording studio. But, If you know his name, it is probably because you have played some of the engaging miniature piano pieces of moderate difficulty that he wrote to enrich the repertoire of students and amateur players of all ages. They remain firm favourites with many teachers and pupils and they continue to be set for the piano examinations of the ABRSM.

**Editha Knocker** (1869–1950) was a talented violinist, conductor, teacher and author. Her family had moved to York on the death of her father, a naval commander who had developed a fatal fever off the coast of Africa. Editha would later teach in York and co-found the York Symphony Orchestra; but her training had included violin study in Berlin with the legendary Joseph Joachim, and she had spent a year before the outbreak of World War I gaining conducting experience with Leopold Auer at the St Petersburg Conservatoire. After serving as a District Nurse during the war, Editha moved to Hampstead, conducted the New Queen's Hall Orchestra, published her first book, *The Making of a Violinist*, began teaching at the Royal Academy of Music and – by the time of this festival – had founded her own School of Violin Playing in the Finchley Road. Among those she taught, either there or at the RAM, were Sidney Griller, Gerald Finzi, Basil Cameron, Sybil Eaton and Watson Forbes, these last two later becoming NLF adjudicators themselves. Today's violin and viola students still have cause to remember Editha, because a letter that she co-wrote to *The Times* in the year of this festival kick-started a scheme to enable good instruments that were "lying idle" in homes to be loaned to serious young students who lacked them; this became the precursor of the current Benslow Music Instrument Loan Scheme.
https://benslowmusic-ils.org/index.asp?pageid=226

**Vivian Langrish** (1894–1980) was born in Bristol and buried in St Endellion, Cornwall. He had studied with Tobias Matthay (who also taught Myra Hess and Clifford Curzon) and he was a member of staff of the Matthay's Pianoforte School for over 25 years, as well as a professor at the Royal Academy of Music. He had a rewarding career as a solo pianist, a lecturer, an adjudicator and an examiner, and also toured South Africa and other countries in these several capacities, giving many concerto performances, notably in London with Sir Henry Wood and Sir Adrian Boult conducting. He was also noted for his two-piano arrangements of orchestral works and, after his death, a Memorial Trust was set up in his name to make grants to RAM students.

**Alfred Quaife** is another of those eminent performers of his day whose biography is not easy to explore. An Associate of the Royal Academy of Music, he taught piano at the Kensington School of Music and was an able enough performer to give the first English performance of Glazunov's First Piano Concerto on 28 Aug 1913 in the Queen's Hall, with the New Queen's Hall Orchestra under Sir Henry Wood. And that is all we have been able to discover.

**C. Kennedy Scott** (1876–1965) was an English organist and choral conductor who played a key role in re-establishing choral and polyphonic music in England. His father was a silk mercer in Hampshire; he was schooled in Southampton and then at the Brussels Conservatoire, where he switched study from violin to organ. Back in London in 1898, he became the organist of the Carmelite Priory in Kensington; but his career was deflected by a visit to the British Library, where he chanced upon some volumes of Tudor music by John Wilbye that sparked a lifelong passion. What would become the English Madrigal Choir (and later the Oriana Madrigal Society) began as a group of enthusiasts meeting in one another's homes. The Choir was formally constituted in 1904 and, in the next decade, Scott issued fifteen volumes of music under the title '*Euterpe: a collection of madrigals and other music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries'*, and also '*Madrigal Singing*', a manual for members of the society. Then, in 1918, he also formed the Philharmonic Choir, with a much broader repertoire. By then, partly as a response to the war, Scott had become deeply engaged with The Ethical Church in Bayswater, from which later grewd the British Humanist Association. His humanist convictions, as well as the outstanding reputation of the choir itself, may explain why Frederick Delius later wrote to him: *"When I think of all the excellent choruses in Europe, yours is the one which I should most love to bring this work [The 'Pagan' Requiem] to light."* And he got his way – Scott's choir gave the premiere, with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Albert Coates in the Queen's Hall, in March 1922.

**Geoffrey Turton Shaw** (1879–1943) was an organist and teacher, but is now best known as a composer of church music in the Anglican tradition. As a boy he had been a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral, and at Caius College Cambridge he was taught by Charles Villiers Stanford and Charles Wood, so it is not surprising that his compositions include anthems, hymn tunes and a collection of descants that appear in the hymnal *Songs of Praise*. The well-known tune to the hymn *My Song is Love Unknown,* although attributed to John Ireland, was composed at Shaw's prompting, over lunch, and written on the back of the

menu! He did also write a ballet, chamber and orchestral works and songs of other kinds, but it is for his church music that he is remembered. Geoffrey Shaw was an experienced adjudicator, having been the first adjudicator of the Thanet Competitive Musical Festival, founded one year after ours.

**Steuart Wilson** (1889–1966) was first a singer and then an administrator. Despite the loss of one lung and a kidney on the Western Front in World War I, he helped launch the famous English Singers madrigal group in the 1920s, and by the time of this festival was in demand as a tenor soloist, particularly in oratorios from Bach to Elgar, although some said that his vocal quality, even then, did not match his interpretative skill. After a few years in America, he stopped performing altogether and took on a series of administrative jobs that earned him a knighthood: he was Music Director of the Arts Council at its inception in 1945, Head of Music at the BBC from 1948 to 1950, Deputy General Administrator at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden from 1950 to 1955 and Head of the Birmingham School of Music from 1957 to 1960. He was clearly a complex character: his first wife left him on grounds of cruelty and married Adrian Boult; he won a libel case against the BBC for publishing a letter from a member of the public critical of his singing; and his resignation from his post at the Royal Opera House was said to have been because he could not bear to be subordinate to a man with a male partner. He was quoted in *The People* of July 1955: *"The influence of perverts in the world of music has grown beyond all measure."* Times have indeed changed: Benjamin Britten, Michael Tippett and Peter Maxwell Davies, all active composers at that period, are now among our English musical treasures.

## 1945 – at the Archway Central Halls (the first full post-war festival)

**Phyllis Bedells** (1893–1985) was a British ballerina and dance teacher who grew up in Bristol in a family that was immersed in amateur opera. By 1906 she was dancing (underage!) at the London Empire Theatre, and by 1914 was their prima ballerina. In 1920, she help to found the Royal Academy of Dance and to define its examination syllabus, but by 1935 she was giving her farewell performance at the London Hippodrome and for most of her remaining 50 years of life she taught ballet and acted as an examiner for the Royal Academy of Dance. This festival in 1945, taking place as World War II

was ending, came at the end of a period when she had been teaching ballet at the Palais de Danse in St Ives, Cornwall. We can't watch her dance, but we can listen to her recollecting her dancing life, recorded in 1976 when she was 83. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/dc5d9040-b2a5-0133-7b81-60f81dd2b63c

**Janet Cram** was a major figure in the development of Modern Theatre dance (tap and troupe dancing) in the UK and created new standards for the dance profession. Zelia Raye, founder in 1931 of the 'Stage Branch' (now the Modern Theatre Faculty, based in London), had noticed her talent; and through Raye's mentorship, Cram became a leading lecturer and encouraged further major developments in these new dance styles, emphasising the necessity for technical and creative training. In this 1945 festival she was adjudicating the Musical Comedy, Tap, Duet and Troupe Dancing competitions. Twenty years later, the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing instituted Janet Cram Awards to its students as a tribute to her invaluable contributions as a mentor, ISTD teacher and examiner.

**Ambrose Coviello** (1887–1950) was, for much of his life, Professor of Piano at the Royal Academy of Music – he even died there! He was also greatly in demand during the 1930s and 1940s as a festival adjudicator. But he was lucky to have lived so long: he had been awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal in 1919 for crawling through enemy lines at Ypres, under heavy machine-gun fire, to establish communications with other British troops. His book *Foundations of Pianoforte Technique* (1934) was still in use long after his death and his *Difficulties of Beethoven pianoforte sonatas: an analysis of common faults in performance with suggestions for their cure* can still be found on eBay.

**Dawson Freer** (d. 1961) taught singing at the Royal College of Music, where the tenor Peter Pears was briefly his pupil in 1934. As a young man in 1914, Freer (himself a baritone) had sung in a Prom in the Queen's Hall under Sir Henry Wood; his book *The teaching of interpretation in song* (1930) was influential. This 1959 letter to The Musical Times may give a sense of his priorities:

*"The term, to ' project ' the voice, has lately crept into the singer's vocabulary ... To ' project', according to the dictionary, is to ' shoot forward ', and the endeavour to do this is responsible for much bad singing. The 'shooting' is done by hammering the breath against the long-suffering vocal cords instead of bringing notes to birth and sustaining them by steady breath pressure. The voice is not a percussion instrument. Neither vocalists nor instrumentalists can make a tone travel, but they can make tones that cannot help travelling because they are unconstricted and resonant. It is the business of the singer to make such tones. The laws of acoustics will make them travel."*

Dawson Freer had previously held the Chair of the North London Festival in 1934–1935.

**Marjorie Hayward** (1885–1953) was born in Greenwich and studied from the age of 12 with Émile Sauret at the Royal Academy of Music, and later with Otakar Ševčík in Prague. She had early successes in the concerto repertoire, performing in Prague, Berlin (where she played Ethel Smyth's *Concerto for Violin, Horn and Orchestra* with Aubrey Brain), Paris, Amsterdam and the Hague. in 1920, she also premiered York Bowen's *Violin Concerto in E minor*, but by then she was focusing mainly on chamber music. John Ireland had dedicated his 1911 *Bagatelle* to her, and together they had premiered his first *Violin Sonata* in 1913. In 1915, she took over the leadership of the English String Quartet (which often included Frank Bridge on viola), and later led the Virtuoso Quartet, the first chamber music group formed specifically for making recordings, which also broadcast and toured frequently; its repertoire extended to quintets, too, with artists such as Harriet Cohen, William Murdoch, Arnold Bax and Léon Goossens. As if that were not enough, she founded the Marjorie Hayward String Quartet and played prominent roles in other groups. She had been made a professor at the RAM in 1924 and, in her spare time as it were, performed in the Proms – 26 times in all, the last being in the year before this 1945 festival. She can be heard here playing Edward German's Henry VIII Dances in 1916, and a Mozart Sonata in 1925.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlgCONfUmSM
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3IhtwNJpPY

**Vivian Langrish – see entry for 1932**

**Reginald Paul** (1894–1974) was a fine concert pianist, chamber musician, accompanist and organist and, for over 30 years, a professor at the Royal Academy of Music. No less important to us is that he was already **Chair of the North London Musical Festival** by the time of this post-war revival, and would continue to be involved with it, as Chair or Vice-Chair, until his death. He had grown up in Bangor, North Wales, where he was astonishing music critics with the playing even before he was ten. After moving to London he became, like **Vivian Langrish**, a student of Tobias Matthay. After army service in World War I, he studied with Percy Waller at the RAM, where he was a contemporary, friend and colleague of the composer (and 1975 NLF Adjudicator) Alan Bush, who later wrote: *" As a student ... I was, perhaps, the second best sight-reader in the [RAM] building, the uncrowned king in this domain being my fellow-student, Reginald Paul."* In the 1920s, Paul gave frequent performances as soloist or accompanist at Wigmore Hall, Aeolian Hall and other leading concert venues, as well as Proms at the Queen's Hall with Sir Henry Wood. After a solo recital in 1935, a critic wrote: *"Some very flattering things have been said of Mr Reginald Paul's playing recently at a promenade concert, as of*

*his recitals last year. Yesterday again at the Wigmore Hall he proved that the praise that has been given him is no more than he deserves*". But he was happy also to be an accompanist or a chamber musician, collaborating with string trios and quartets and forming a quartet of his own with George Stratton (violin), Watson Forbes (viola) and John Moore (cello). His repertoire was broad. John Ireland was particularly appreciative of Paul's playing of his works, and wrote to him in 1936: *".. I remember so well your really fine performance of my sonata, probably the best it has ever had."* Arnold Bax and Herbert Howells expressed themselves similarly, the latter after a broadcast performance of his Piano Quartet in 1950.

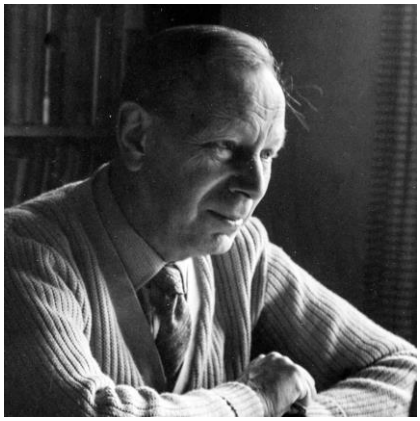
Reginald Paul broadcast often for the BBC but he featured in relatively few recordings. He can be heard here, playing Saint-Saëns's Second Piano Concerto, with Stanley Chapple conducting (see 1932 adjudicator biographies)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_EH6JDe_x4


**Dale Smith** was a baritone singer, but the only online record that we can find is this two-minute British Pathé film, made in 1931, of him singing 'Shenandoah', striding about in a nautical costume, surrounded by a chorus/crowd of smirking, smoking 'sailors', and not very well lip-synched to the music!
https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/64437/

**Marcus Thomson** studied at the Royal Academy of Music between 1902 and 1906 and became a successful baritone concert singer, especially in Scotland. In 1912 he sang in Glasgow City Hall: "*Mr Marcus Thomson's fine baritone voice was heard to advantage in several solo items, and he also took part with Miss Hill in a duet, 'Good Night, Dear Heart.'*" He also recorded several songs for Marathon Records between 1912 and 1915 but, as the 80 rpm discs were cut in an unusual way with vertical movement of the stylus to allow them to play for longer, they don't seem to have been transcribed. In 1920 Thomson was appointed as Professor of Singing at the RAM, and he remained on the staff until the 1950s. His daughter, Geraldine Mucha, also studied at the RAM and became a composer, shuttling between Scotland and Prague with her Czech husband during the 1960s.

**Dr Eric H. Thiman** (1900–1975) was an organist and composer who studied mainly with private teachers but became a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists in 1921 and a Mus.D.(London) in 1927, when he was still only 27.

From 1931 he was Professor of Harmony at the Royal Academy of Music, warmly respected as a gifted and patient teacher. He was organist of The Park Chapel in Crouch End for thirty years and then, for twenty years from 1957, at The City Temple, Holborn Viaduct (the 'Cathedral of the Free Churches') where his outstanding gifts, especially for improvisation on hymn tunes, were much admired. Eric Thiman was an examiner for the Royal College of Organists and the Associated Board, and a frequent adjudicator at music festivals such as ours. From 1956 to 1962 he was also Dean of the Faculty of Music at London University, and conducted choral societies in the London area. He published over 1300 compositions, including anthems, organ andpiano pieces, songs, works for choir and orchestra – sacred and secular – hymns, canticles and educational music, and also some lighter songs under the name of Eric Harding. His widow, Madeline, stipulated in her will that the royalties from all these works should benefit the RAM, so a fund was set up to help talented students in need of financial support and an organ prize was also awarded annually in his name.

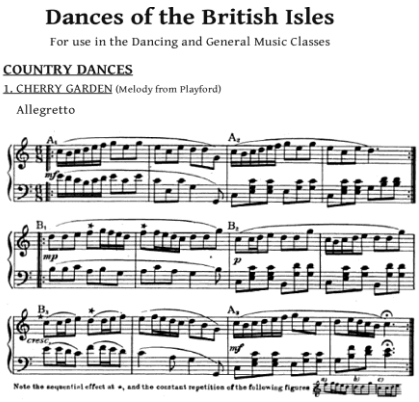


Little seems to be known about the two elocution adjudicators for 1945

**J. (James) Clifford Turner** was the author of *Voice & Speech in the Theatre* (first published in 1950, and now on sale at Amazon in its 5th edition), a classic guide for actors at all levels. According to the latest blurb "*One of the great voice teachers of his day, J. Clifford Turner here uses simple and direct language to impart the necessary technical 'basics' of speech and voice*".

**Dorothea Webb** was a singer with a special interest in folk song, as well as in teaching elocution. She is recorded as a staff member at Prior's Field School, Guildford, in December 1940, and also as a Professor of Singing and Elocution at the Royal College of Music. Her essay *Some aspects of song interpretation* was published in the Proceedings of the Royal Musical Society in the year of this festival and is still available in archived form.

**Lucy Welch** was regularly asked to take charge of percussion bands, nursery songs and singing games at our festivals between 1938 and 1956. An Associate of the Royal Academy of Music, she clearly specialised in this area, and her *Halfway House Song Book* and *Dances of the British Isles,* a set of 28 piano accompaniments for dancing and music classes, both bear that out: *Dances* was republished in 2017, and as an eBook in 2018.


Dances of the British Isles

For use in the Dancing and General Music Classes

COUNTRY DANCES

1. CHERRY GARDEN (Melody from Playford)

Allegretto

## 1960 – still at the Archway Central Halls

**Henry Cummings** (1906–1989) was an Irish baritone who studied at the Royal Academy of Music and later with John Coates. After a career giving recitals and concerts all over the country, including the first Sunday Prom at the Royal Albert Hall in 1943, he was appointed Professor of Voice at the RAM. During World War II he had broadcast regularly on Radio Luxembourg with (according to his daughter) coded messages to help the resistance movement: she has described how a car would collect him from his home in Watford, usually in the middle of the night, to take him to what is now Haberdasher Aske's Boys School in Elstree where he would sing songs in foreign languages – she thinks Flemish, Dutch or Luxembourgish. *"Of course, he had no idea what messages the songs contained"* . This 1985 portrait by Margaret Palmer hangs in the RAM

**Joan Davies** had a long career as a performer on both pianoforte and, in later life, fortepiano. She had studied at the Royal Academy of Music and then with the Dutch virtuoso Egon Petri, and by 1928 she was partnering Dennis Dance in the two-piano recital that features in his Chairman's biography. Later, with Max Gilbert (a student of Lionel Tertis and by then principal viola of the LSO) she gave the first broadcast performance of William Alwyn's *Ballade for Viola and Piano* on the BBC Home Service in August 1940 (still wartime); and we also have the programme for a 1945 concert organised by Ethel Bilsland in Elstree, in which Joan played several solo works. After that, there is a hiatus spanning this 1960 festival, but she was still active in February 1969, giving a recital on piano and fortepiano in the Purcell Room that included works by Voříšek, Hummel, Beethoven, Liszt and Messiaen – an extraordinarily eclectic range.

**Leslie Fly** was a pianist who specialised in the composition of educational piano music. An Associate of the Royal College of Music, he was a house composer for the Manchester publisher Forsyth Brothers Ltd in the early 1900s, and over many years he gained stature as a composer of educational piano music of the highest quality. His compositions are said to be distinctive and attractive, whilst also encouraging the development of technical skills in an accessible way: we can't speak from personal experience, though, as we can for another of this history's educational specialists, Thomas Dunhill .

**Rosalie Helliwell** was a local piano teacher who had studied at the Royal Academy of Music and also the Royal College, and seems later to have taught at the Guildhall School of Music.

**Joyce Howard** was a Royal Academy-trained soprano who advertised in NLF syllabuses as a recitalist, adjudicator and teacher, living in Muswell Hill. She was adjudicating for solo singing classes in the in 1960 festival, but we have found no record at all of her online.

**Nannie Jamieson** (1904–1990) still has a vivid web presence three decades after her death, and not only because of her auburn hair, which led a 2003 biographer to title her essay *The Red Hot Magnet: An appreciation of the life and work of Nannie Jamieson.* At this 1960 festival Nannie was asked to adjudicate "Strings, Recorders etc." which seems to have included Percussion Bands; but her own instruments were violin and viola. Agnes Jessie Hamilton Jamieson (to name her in full) was born in Edinburgh into a very musical family, and most of her studies were in Berlin, where she was a pupil of Carl Flesch and a colleague of Max Rostal, whom she helped to come to Britain in 1934. By that time she was leading a piano quartet, with her sister Hilda on cello, but in 1939, working at Dartington Hall in Devon, she switched to viola as part of the Robert Masters Piano Quartet and in 1946 became Professor of Violin and Viola at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. She also taught, at various times, at Chetham's School, Manchester and Homerton College, Cambridge. She was the first Organising Secretary of the British Branch of the European String Teachers Association, and she played viola not only in the Robert Masters Quartet but also in the London Mozart Players and the Menuhin Festival Orchestra, which she had helped to found. Nannie was awarded an MBE for services to music in 1981. There's more at
https://www.estastrings.org.uk/nannie-jamieson-and-the-nutshell-fund/

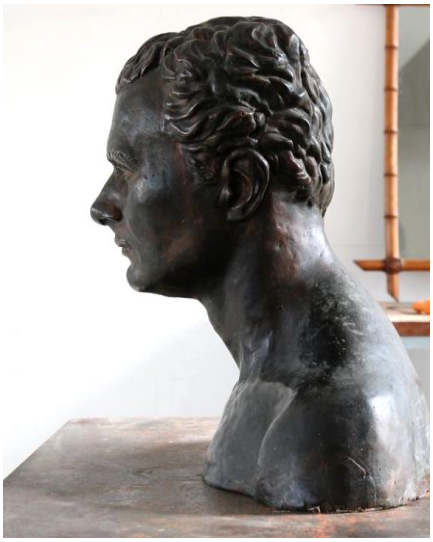
**Rona Laurie** (1916-2020) was 'only' 94 when she published *My War Years in London*, and she lived to be 103. She had studied English Literature at University, trained for the stage at RADA (where she was awarded the Principal's Medal in 1940) and acted in repertory, on tour and finally in the West End during London's World War II Blitz. By the time of her retirement, she was Professor of Drama and Education at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. She was also a long-time member of GODA, the Guild of Dramatic Adjudicators: her book *Festivals and Adjudication* (1975) became recommended reading for those applying for GODA Membership. Other books included *Auditioning: A Practical Guide for the Would-be Actor and Drama Student (*1985) and *The Actor's Art and Craft* (1994). Tony Rushforth, a long-time colleague at GODA, remembers her as "*a very special lady*", the

fulfilment of her own published recipe for success in the field of adjudication: *"The professional adjudicator must assess carefully, have high standards, and stick to them. He/she must sift the grain from the chaff and all the time give constructive criticism."*

**Michael Mullinar** (1895–1973) was invited to adjudicate the choral entries at this festival, but he was by profession an organist and pianist who specialised in accompaniment, in time becoming Professor of Accompaniment at the Royal College of Music where he had studied with Gustav Holst and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Vaughan Williams often sent him draft works to be played through and discussed, and dedicated his Sixth Symphony to him. He wrote songs himself, and some were performed at the Proms between 1918 and 1924, although they have now largely vanished from view. In 1934, he made an arrangement for violin and piano of the *Fantasia on Greensleeves* from Vaughan Williams's opera *Sir John in Love*, but it has been eclipsed by Vaughan Williams's own version for flutes, harp and strings, prepared in the same year.

**Reginald Paul – see entry for 1945**

**Charles Proctor** (1906–1996) was born in East Finchley, in the heart of the NLF's territory, and studied at Highgate School, the Royal Academy of Music and (with Liszt's pupil and musical heir Emil Sauer) in Dresden and Vienna. His career thereafter was long and varied, opening as a concert pianist and continuing as conductor, organist, composer, teacher, lecturer, writer, examiner and adjudicator. At Trinity College of Music, generations of students gained not only from his training but, crucially, from the inspiration of his own example, instilling into them a deep dedication to the art of music.



Charles Proctor was deeply involved with the North London Musical Festival from 1939 (perhaps earlier) to this 1960 event and beyond: He was NLF's Chairman for the last twelve of those years, during which many thousands of young musicians entered for the festival's annual competitions. In 1940, at the request of Sir Henry Wood, he had founded the Alexandra Choir, based at Alexandra Palace in Muswell Hill, which he continued to conduct until 1978; and for much of that long period he was also organist at St-Jude-on-the-Hill in Hampstead Garden Suburb, a stone's-throw away from its Edwin Lutyens' twin, the Free Church, which is the current main venue for our festival. His wife Rosemary Rennie was an artist and sculptor, and this bust of him is her work.

**Alan Richardson** (1904-1978) was born in Edinburgh, where he worked as a pianist for the BBC before going to London to study piano and composition with Harold Craxton at the Royal Academy of Music. In 1931 he made a concert tour of Australia and New Zealand, and was accompanist for the virtuoso violinist Carl Flesch from 1936 to 1939. He was appointed Professor of Piano at the RAM in 1960, a position he held until his death. While teaching, and working as a humane and encouraging examiner and festival adjudicator, he also continued as a much-coveted accompanist and chamber musician. In 1961, he married renowned oboist Janet Craxton, the daughter of his teacher Harold, and he wrote several works for her, as well as for the violist Watson Forbes.

(Laurence) **Fabian Smith** (1908-1998) was a baritone soloist who, by the end of his long career, had become Head of Singing at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He had worked with Sir Thomas Beecham, who was still alive at the time of this festival although he died in the following year – their collaboration on Delius's *A Village Romeo and Juliet* is now available on CD, having been broadcast by the BBC in April 1948. (The same recording can also be found on Spotify.) In the same period, he was involved in two films for TV, playing Captain MacHeath in *The Beggar's Opera* and A Burglar in AP Herbert's short play *The Policeman's Serenade.* Even after his official retirement from the Guildhall, aged 75, he continued to teach, and the singer Deborah Hudson was awarded a scholarship to study with him privately when he was in his 80s. On his death, the Croydon Advertiser wrote him a glowing tribute in which two people who had worked with him described him as "*an absolute gentleman ... the finest teacher I have come across in 45 years*" and "*a delight, a small man with twinkling blue eyes, and a wonderful way of teaching*." A fuller biography can be found in a website devoted to his wife's family history at https://www.pattersonbakeredwards.com/jamespatterson.htm

**Thelma Tillaney** studied Speech and Drama at the Royal Academy of Music, obtaining her Licentiate in 1952. She may well have taught at the Guildhall School, because she left them a substantial bequest. She was certainly an Associate there, and also taught at her home in Grange Park, N21.

**Rex Walters** (1907–1995) was an actor, theatrical producer and, from 1950, Professor of Drama at the Guildhall School. He was born in Birmingham and was tempted as a young man by another career when he showed high promise as a cricketer and played for Warwickshire. After being understudy to England's wicketkeeper, Tiger Smith, however, he decided to move on to more principal roles as an actor, in his developing love of the theatre. He toured with Sir Barry Jackson's

company, playing the lead in some of Jackson's productions, and then moved into production himself, taking a touring company to present Shakespearean plays in thirty-nine American states. That gave him an entry into films and broadcasting: his most enduring film role was probably as Charles II in the 1938 film *Wren of St. Paul's*, but until war began he was also director and producer of the Theatre Royal, Bath.

*"Then began the real-life drama of counter-intelligence in the RAF. He was liaising with the Maquis in France, attending a secret meeting in a farmhouse, when the Germans approached. He donned a nightgown and was bundled into bed with a huge Frenchman, when the Germans entered the room, put on the light, made their apologies and left. He claimed the experience put him off garlic for all time!"* (The Herald, 1995)

After the war, Rex Walters was known for producing variety shows and, after gaining his Chair at the Guildhall School, gained a high reputation as a teacher and examiner, imparting his own love of theatre to another generation.

**Helen Wingrave** was an influential teacher of folk dance. She had joined the National Dance Branch of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing within a year of its foundation in 1952, her particular interest being not in the historical background to folk dances but in using their steps to choreograph solos, duets, trios and groups for theatrical settings such as dance performances and competitions. Many of those choreographies are still in the syllabus today. In the 1960s, she worked closely with Robert Harrold, whose interests were similar, and together they wrote *Aspects of Folk Dance in Europe*, which is still in print today. She also conducted, in 1972, the first overseas examinations of the branch, in New Zealand and subsequently in many other countries. She was married to, and outlived, the Scottish woodcarver Ian MacNab (d. 1967), at whose Grosvenor School of Modern Art she had run a dance course between the wars.

## 1975 – in St George's Parish Hall, Muswell Hill

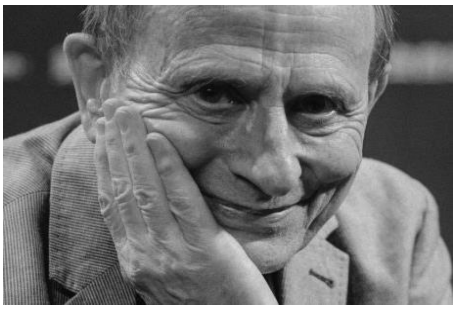
**Alan Bush** (1900–1995) was a significant figure in the world of composition, yet largely ignored by broadcasters and concert programmers for much of his life because of his anti-establishment views. Born in Dulwich, he was educated at home and at Highgate School, then studied composition and piano at the Royal Academy of Music. We have already noted in our biography of

Reginald Paul that Bush considered himself only the *second-best* sight-reader there at that time, but he won several awards and prizes: his composition teacher was Frederick Corder, who adjudicated for the first North London Festival in 1920, probably while Bush was his pupil, and he studied piano with the influential Tobias Matthay. He also studied after graduation with John Ireland, who became a long-term friend.

But the loss of one of Bush's elder brothers on the Western Front in 1917, added to what he had learned during time spent studying in Berlin from 1929 to 1931 when the Nazi party was on the rise, led this already left-wing-leaning young man to join the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1935, when another war seemed likely. Many of his works in the 1930s had been written for workers' choirs affiliated to the International Labour Party, and his pro-Soviet stance led to a temporary ban on his music by the BBC in the early years of World War II. (The Soviets were, of course, crucial allies against Hitler's Germany, but nevertheless not favoured by our political elites.) As a result, four major operas of his were premiered in East Germany between 1950 and 1970. But, despite these difficulties, he taught harmony and composition at the RAM for more than 50 years and served as chairman and vice-president of the Composers' Guild of Great Britain.

**Joan Davies – see entry for 1960**

**Christopher Elton** (b 1944) was born in Edinburgh and studied at the Royal Academy of Music, where he graduated in both piano and cello and went on to win major international prizes as a pianist while still freelancing with London orchestras as a cellist! Although his own career as a soloist and chamber-musician was significant, including as it did both broadcasting and recording, his international recognition stems largely from the quality of his teaching. He has long served as a professor of piano at the RAM (he became a Fellow in 1983) and he was Head of Keyboard there for 24 years. His former students include some very familiar names, including Freddy Kempf, Yevgeny Sudbin, Joanna MacGregor, Inon Barnatan, Ashley Wass, Benjamin Grosvenor and Julian Trevelyan. As a result, he is also in great demand as a jury member for international piano competitions.

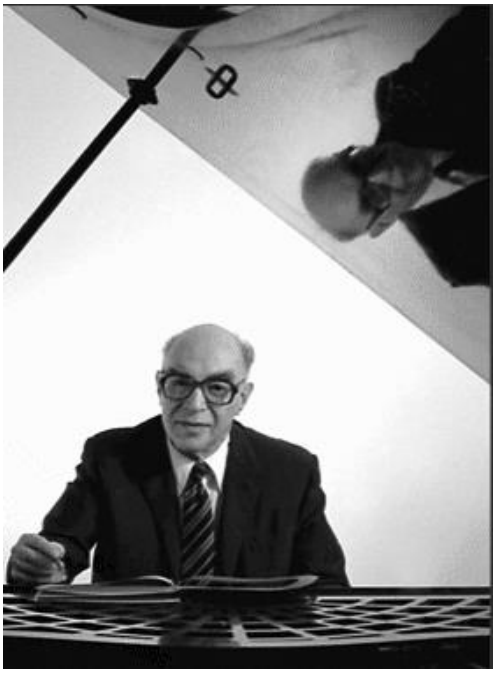


*Meeting Christopher Elton at the Emanuel Trophy was a real turning point … he went on to teach me for a good few years.*

Sebastian, 2007 winner

**Lionel Salter** (1914–2000) was one of those men who find the time and energy to do everything well. He must have inherited crucial musical genes from his ancestor Solomon Sulzer, a friend to Beethoven and Schubert; his father taught languages and his mother worked for a record company. So, naturally, he began to accompany professionally at the age of 12, won a childhood piano competition after studying the music for only 10 minutes (away from the piano), and became a linguist, broadcaster and recording expert.

At Cambridge he studied music theory with Edward Dent, piano with Bach specialist James Ching and harpsichord with Boris Ord. He played in a hundred or so concerts there, and left with first-class degrees in both music and modern languages. Later, at the Royal Academy, he studied with Arthur Benjamin but also picked up skills with the viola and the conductor's baton. He was a phenomenal sight-reader: he tackled the piano part in Stravinsky's Petruschka for Ernest Ansermet without needing to prepare it.



His apprenticeship as a 'media musician' began at the Denham Studios of London Films, where he edited and orchestrated film scores, acted as chorus master and played the piano for any actor who was doing so on screen, at the same time learning the techniques of cameras and film cutting. His long association with the BBC began in 1936, when he turned down an offer of work in Hollywood to be the station accompanist for the world's first television channel; he then gradually ascended through what biographer Martin Anderson calls *"the BBC's hierarchy of starchy titles"* until, in 1967, he reached Assistant Controller, Music. As his boss was that devotee of musical modernism, William Glock, everything else was left to Salter, who finally retired from the BBC in 1974, though his voice was still regularly heard on Radio 3. In parallel, he wrote regular reviews for The Gramophone from 1948 until just days before his death, thousands of programme notes, and books.

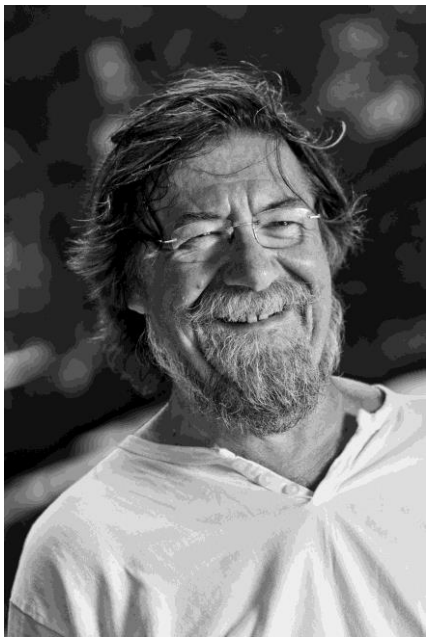
Most important for this NLF biography, though, was his role in musical education. He was an Associated Board examiner and a festival and competition adjudicator in venues all around the world, including ours. His judgments were always honest and direct, putting an unerring finger on the points that required attention but always in such a kindly way that the young musician involved felt a real sense of encouragement.

(Sourced mainly from https://www.lionelsalter.co.uk/biography.html)

**Geoffrey Shaw** was a bass-baritone singer and choral conductor who worked at various times with The Academy of Ancient Music, The London Early Music Group and the Purcell Consort of Voices, but about whom the web is otherwise silent. He is not to be confused with Geoffrey Turton Shaw, whose biography can be found in the adjudicator list for 1932 and who died in 1943.

**Anne Harvey** ( c.1934–2023) was born in Totteridge and attended Queen Elizabeth II school in Barnet and then the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. For three seasons she ran her own theatre company in Cornwall, but then returned to London, working in theatre and radio, teaching, adjudicating and examining and in 2003 becoming a Fellow of the Society of Teachers of Speech and Drama. Her literary work includes portrayals of Christina Rossetti, Emily Tennyson, Gwen Raverat, Charlotte Mew, Dodie Smith, Eleanor Farjeon and Rumer Godden, and she edited over 35 anthologies of poetry and drama.

**Nigel Osborne** (b 1948) studied at Oxford from 1968 to 1970 with Egon Wellesz and Kenneth Leighton, and then in Warsaw with Witold Rudzinski. He co-founded one of the first live-electronic performing groups in Eastern Europe and has composed extensively for live electroacoustic media, but the core of his output is acoustic ensemble music, stemming from long-term collaborations with groups such as the London Sinfonietta, the Nash Ensemble, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the City of London Sinfonia. He has also written for the theatre and for opera and for 23 years was Reid Professor at the University of Edinburgh. So far, so (relatively) conventional for a top-flight musician. But Nigel Osborne MBE is an extraordinary human in other ways, too, as we (Rosemary & Jeremy) discovered for ourselves when we played for a charity concert in support of Ukrainian children in 2023 and heard him speak about his work using music therapy to help children traumatized by war. While at Oxford, he had studied nursing alongside music, and he later offered his services as an aid worker during the Bosnian war. He quickly found that involving war-damaged children in music was of great value – at one point, Osborne's team was being funded to work with such 3,000 children a week. Since then, his organisation has done similar work in many countries, Ukraine being its focus in 2022-4. Nothing if not versatile, on this occasion (just rising 27) he was adjudicating classes for strings, wind, recorder and guitar.



## 1990 – in the United Reformed Church, Tetherdown, Muswell Hill

**Douglas Craig** (1916–2009) ) was born Ernest Herbert Douglas Jones in Vauxhall, south London, on May 26 1916, the only son of a jeweller and pawnbroker who was fighting in Flanders at the time of his son's birth. Later, pressed by the opera companies, Douglas (who always disliked his first two names) changed his surname because of the number of theatrical Joneses! He was educated at Latymer Upper School, sang at All Soul's, Langham Place, and won a choral scholarship to St Catharine's College, Cambridge, where he read Languages, sang with the Footlights and took the Winchester Prize in 1938. Called up to serve in the Signals, he was soon transferred to Bletchley Park, where coded enemy messages were analysed and dispatched. In later years he recalled with pleasure how he had translated exchanges between Hitler in Berlin and Rommel in North Africa.

By 1949, as Douglas Craig, he had begun to build a career as a baritone with small roles in the opera house. For a while he sang with Sadler's Wells Opera, but soon found his métier in teaching and directing. He was also asked by the Arts Council to run its *Opera for All* scheme, which took performances outside the major metropolitan centres. He moved to Glyndebourne in 1952 as stage director and, later, assistant general manager, but returned to London in 1959, where he turned his hand to producing at Sadler's Wells and joined the Royal College of Music, becoming the college's resident producer two years later and also working at the London Opera Centre. From 1966 to 1970, as general administrator of Welsh National Opera in Cardiff, he worked on the music for the Investiture of the Prince of Wales and a memorable production of Falstaff. But the challenge of running Sadler's Wells proved to be too strong to resist, even in some of the theatre's most difficult times. In 1978, accepting defeat, he accepted the post of head of the RCM's opera and drama school, continuing to work there long into his official retirement.

**Elizabeth Hawes** was at one time Head of Vocal Studies at Trinity College of Music and Dance (now Trinity Laban) where she was an Honorary Fellow. But very little can be found about her on the web, other than that she had a Licentiate from the Royal Academy of Music and was married in 1945 to the painter, draughtsman and printmaker David Thomas Smith.

**Kate Elmitt** (b 1925) was born into a musical family, starting to learn the piano at age 4 and the cello a few years later, and broadcasting for the first time at the age of 12. Following studies at the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College, she won scholarships to study with Michelangeli in Arrezo and Bruno Seidhofer in Vienna for three further years. She has been teaching piano, accompanying (particular the Vivace Choir in Arlesey which she founded with her late husband) and playing chamber music ever since: her Piano Academy organised a special concert for her 80th birthday in 2015 and as far as we can discover she is still active in retirement, with the *"seemingly boundless energy"* that she had given to her work. On her website she writes: *"My aim in life has been to inspire and encourage folk of all ages and standards to love and embrace classical music. It is humbling to realise just how many students I have taught and how many have become professional musicians."*

**Alexander Kelly** (1929–1996) had his first experience of the Royal Academy of Music as a 17-year-old in 1946, when a Caird scholarship enabled him to leave his native Edinburgh to study there. He broke off his studies for National Service in 1949, resuming them two years later, and studied piano with Harold Craxton and composition with Sir Lennox Berkeley before making his Royal Festival Hall debut with Sir Thomas Beecham. He taught at the RAM for over 30 years, including such broadcasting luminaries as David Owen Norris and Iain Burnside among his pupils; and he was made Head of Keyboard Studies in 1984, retiring in 1992. Meanwhile, he had been giving regular masterclasses, some of which were broadcast, working as a adjudicator and ABRSM examiner, and bringing up two daughters with his wife Margaret, one, Catriona, now being a Professor of Russian Literature at Oxford and the other, Alison Moncrieff Kelly, having a flourishing career as a cellist.

**Peggy Batchelor** ( 1916–2020) was an actress, drama teacher and adjudicator, who studied under Frank Ridley at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama before the war took her to the Far East as a member of the Entertainment National Service Association (ENSA). Back in England, she founded the Ridley

Studios in Leigh-on-Sea in 1955, named for her former teacher and numbering Sybil Thorndike among her Patrons. In 1973 she became a Fellow of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where she had studied, and was also Vice-Chairman of the Society of Teachers of Speech and Drama. She was a member of the Guild of Drama Adjudicators, and travelled extensively in that role, alongside her long acting career on the stage, in film and on radio (who remembers Mrs Dale's Diary?) and on television.

**Louis Carus** (1927–2012) was a Scot, born in the Punjab to a musical family, educated at Rugby School, the Brussels Conservatoire and Baltimore's Peabody Conservatory: nothing, then, if not cosmopolitan! He went on to play a leading role in the musical life of Scotland, the English Midlands and Cornwall as a renowned violinist, teacher and orchestral player, co-founding several chamber ensembles, encouraging Scottish composers, being for a time Head of Strings at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music, leading the Northern Sinfonia and co-leading the Monteverdi Orchestra and, from 1975, being Principal of Birmingham's School of Music. Founding new things seems to have become a habit for him: he was a musician who knew how to generate the confidence in his students and colleagues that would make such enterprises successful. So, back in the spring and summer of 1958, we could have found him in Cornwall, co-founding the St Endellion Music Festival, a joyous, non-profit enterprise in which he continued to be involved for the next half-century, leading the festival orchestra and establishing the conductor Richard Hickox as one of its key musicians – he and his wife are now buried in the churchyard there. Another important long-term engagement was with the Benslow Instrument Loan Scheme, based near Hitchin, to which he was a consultant as well as a patron and lender, having himself benefited, early in his career, from being loaned a fine instrument that nurtured his talents. He had officially retired three years before we find him here, adjudicating in Muswell Hill.

## 2003–2015

From 2003 onwards, adjudicators were asked to supply their own biographies for publication in the syllabuses. Those for 2003 and 2005–2015 have been scanned from the printed syllabuses and are transcribed as Appendix 2-J.

**Return to Packing List** — or read on about Competitors

## Section 2.5 Competitors

- *What motivates young people to enter, often in successive years? Is it the prizes? Is it the honour? Is it the experience? How have these changed?*

The first North London Festival was clearly modelled directly on the Stratford and East London Musical Festival, which was the grandfather of all such festivals and with which it shared that man-of-all-work, John Graham. So we can assume that those who entered were also similar in their goals, and attracted by the same incentives. What was on offer to tempt them?

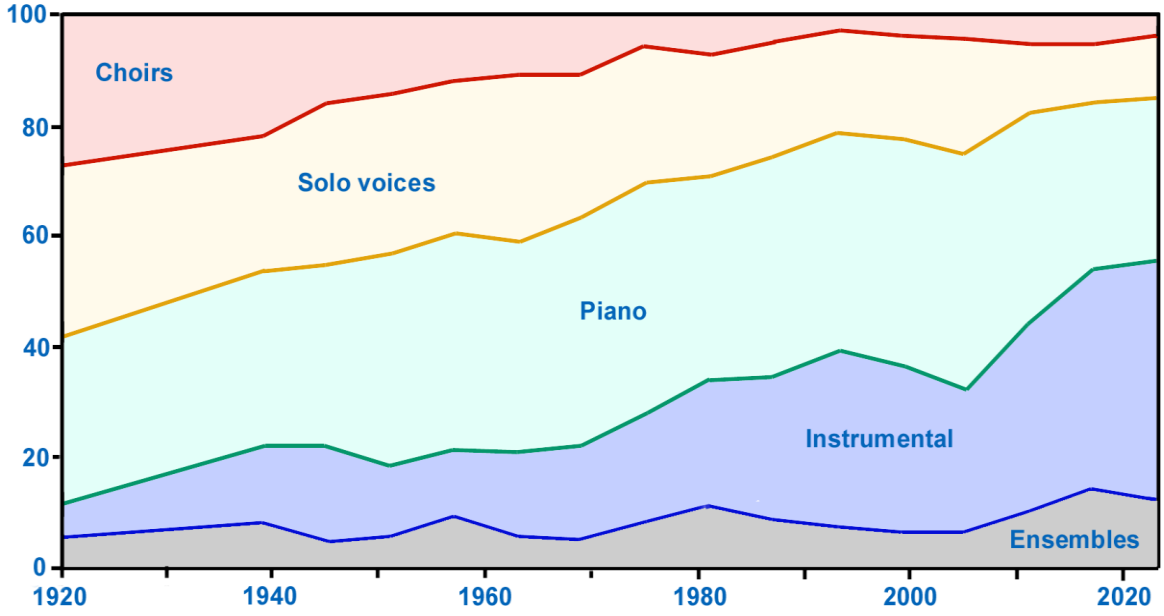
The physical cups, trophies and cash prizes are discussed elsewhere (see *Section 5.0*). In any case, our own experience has been that most competitors are realistic about their chances of winning so, for them, the main incentives have always been the honour and self-respect gained by rising to a challenge and the experience of performing in front of a discerning audience without being intimidated by it. It's unlikely that anyone who entered in 1920 remains alive today to be asked: they'd be at least 112. But we can draw inferences from the types of competition that were most popular, then and now.

In 1920, there were fourteen separate competitions for choirs, each specifying a maximum number of voices, ranging from 20 to 60 with an average of 35. Our records for later years imply that the organisers would expect at least three choirs to compete in each class, so even if the typical choir only had half the maximum number of singers we can estimate that at least 100 individual men, women, boys or girls were involved in each class, and thus some 1400 were competing in the choral section overall.

A glee club in 1912

By comparison, we would estimate that the nineteen solo singing competitions would each have attracted only some half-dozen entrants, or perhaps a dozen at most before the adjudication became unwieldy, so it could be that as few as 120-240 individuals were involved. Piano competitions would have been very similar in class and total numbers, and there were only four classes for solo strings. All in all, then, probably two-thirds of those performing were doing so in choirs, where winning is a great honour but the responsibility lies chiefly with the trainer/conductor and not, usually, the individual.

How has this pattern changed? For a start, there are now far more classes for individual performers, either singing or playing instruments ranging from piano, through four types of bowed strings and a range of orchestral wind and brass instruments, to harps, guitars, recorders and, in some years, concertinas! Although class sizes inevitably remain small, this greatly increases the total number of people taking personal responsibility for their own performance. In 2012, for example (the latest year for which detailed entry, as distinct from class, numbers are available), there were 934 entries for solo singers and instrumentalists, as against just 15 for choirs (perhaps involving 300 singers).




*Percentages of classes for different competitors*

Does this mean that more children are learning an instrument? Probably, although this may not continue now that that publicly-funded schools have less access to in-school instrumental teaching than they did.

Does it mean that children are becoming more confident as individuals? Possibly, although today's smaller audiences must also be far less intimidating than those of pre-war years.

Does it mean that the incentives for competing are now seen as greater? We would like to think that parents and teachers alike are much more conscious now of the effect that a musical upbringing can have on every cognitive and motor skill, not just those directly required for musical performance; and also that employers, too, are aware that performance skills have value even when they are recruiting for jobs outside the musical realm.

What can we say about those children who enter over many successive years. We can't compare modern times with the festival's early history in this respect, but the modern picture tells us several things:-

> *Music doesn't have to become one's career. I encourage all my older students to pursue other avenues if they have other passions*
>
> A competitor for the Accompanists Prize; now a piano teacher

First, although some of those who enter repeatedly may be hoping to win prizes that have eluded them in the past, most have no such expectations and do it for the experience. Now that most competitions allow a free choice of repertoire, entrants can choose pieces that they are preparing for grade examinations later in the session; in this case, the experience gained could be quite specific, and could be repeated in successive years. To make that easier, for piano and strings there are now specific classes linked to the conservatoire exam syllabuses.

Secondly, the process of learning to communicate interactively with an audience on an emotional level, which is useful in almost every walk of life, is not something that can be learned in one 'take'. It comes more naturally to some children than others, but few fail to benefit from repeated opportunities.

## Recollections of some previous competitors

Unlike those who entered in 1920, recent competitors can tell us directly what motivated them. Where we had ways of tracking them down, we have been asking them to do just that, and their responses are varied and illuminating:

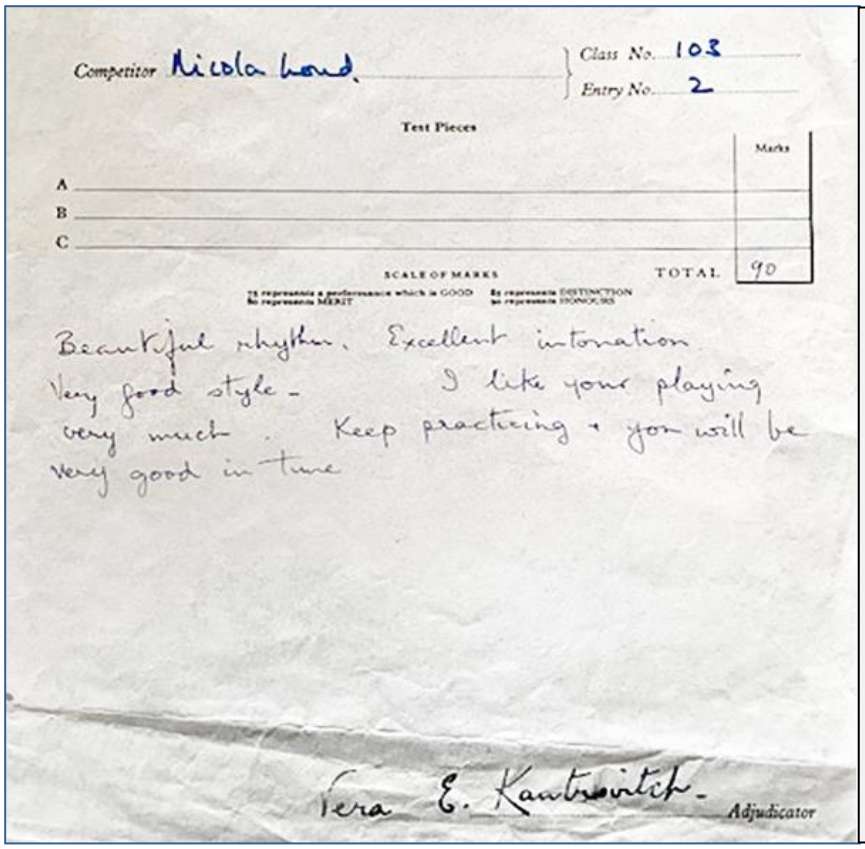
Anna, a clarinettist who won medals 20 years ago and now has a well-developed performing and teaching career, wrote:

*"Somewhere I've still kept the various medals from many years of taking part in this festival. As a child, and teenager, I found that entering various categories each year enabled me to perform lots of different repertoire in public, and get more accustomed to performing and getting such useful feedback from the adjudicators. It also had a wonderful feeling of inclusivity and diversity as the categories were based on ability, not age, so as a 12 year old I might be performing alongside a 70 year old!"*

Nicola, a violinist who took part every year from an early age, wrote:

*"We heard about it from all my musician friends who were also participants at that time... it was great fun and something that I loved to take part in as it was a fabulous performance opportunity. It was also a chance to meet up with my friends; I certainly only have positive memories of it."*

Here is Nicola's adjudication certificate from 1980, when she was five.



Competitor Nicola Hand. Class No. 103 Entry No. 2

Test Pieces

Marks

A

B

C

SCALE OF MARKS TOTAL 90

Beautiful rhythm. Excellent intonation
Very good style - I like your playing very much. Keep practising + you will be very good in time

Vera E. Kantrovitch Adjudicator

*The adjudicator, Vera Kantrovitch, was born in 1910. She had led orchestras for Ralph Vaughan Williams, exchanging letters with him in the 1940s and 50s, and she would have been 70 when she wrote this note. We shall probably never know whether she remembered her prediction when Nicola won the BBC Young Musician competition ten years later!*

Kotéche, who won the Emanuel Trophy over 30 years ago and is now a concert pianist, teacher, chamber musician and composer, wrote:

*"Looking back, I can still feel that excitement. The heart-beating moments before you perform and the ecstatic euphoria afterwards. The whole experience was professional and supportive ... the organisers created a space for participants to thrive under pressure [which] is a priceless resource supporting resilience and increasing confidence."*

Hannah, a pianist who won two prizes in 2007 and now teaches pianists, wrote:

*"Travelling to London independently from Wales as a 16 year old to take part in the festival for the first time was one of several formative experiences during this period of my life which really helped me to 'spread my wings' and broaden my horizons as a developing young musician."*

Joo Yeon, a violinist who won our President's Award in 2007, wrote:

*"The Festival has been a big part of my younger years when I was a student at Purcell School of Music (where I am a violin teacher these days). This was a period of time when I signed up for any performance opportunity, and the Bishopsgate concert was part of the grand prizes!"*

Sebastian, who won the Emanuel Trophy in 2007, wrote:

*"I came from practically nothing and music was a real escape for me ... I got lessons for free through Lancing College where I had won a full scholarship ... I did everything I could before my music career, to escape my, at times, poverty stricken upbringing ... I still have many fond memories of the Emanuel Trophy competition. It is where I met Christopher Elton who went on to teach me for a good few years after ... [This] was a real turning point for me as he pushed me to enter bigger competitions and focus my career on a particular style."*

Alexandra, who entered as an accompanist for the Singing Recital Competition in 2018, was aiming to get performing experience outside her conservatoire:

*"I was a postgraduate student at the Academy during that time, so life was very manic with competitions and masterclasses! I only really knew of the other participants being conservatoire students during my brief times there, and therefore very serious about finding a career in music."*

Erika, a singer who competed (with another accompanist) for that same Recital Prize in 2018, wrote:

*"It gave me a platform to present arias and songs In was working on during my studies, and inspired me to finesse this repertoire with my wonderful accompanist ... The experience was a very positive one that encouraged me to continue exploring my artistry ... now singing leading [operatic] roles."*

By contrast, Milo, winner of the Camac Harp Competition and President's Prize in 2018, had competed in the NLF many times before reaching those heights:

*"I began entering the graded rounds as a young teenager. It was rare to hear other harpists my age, and listening to pieces I was learning provided valuable insights into how I wanted to interpret those works. I loved performing for others, and the harp—being such a visually impressive instrument—often elicited enthusiastic reactions. Performing in front of a room full of harpists who were already familiar with the technique and repertoire presented a challenge; but, at that age, I just wanted to have a go and enjoy the experience!*

*"After competing in the graded rounds, I would listen to the Camac Harp Competition, where most of the competitors were students from UK conservatoires. Hearing such high-level performances was both inspiring and a bit intimidating; I often wondered if I would ever reach that standard. In my first year at the RAM I entered the Camac competition but wasn't quite ready. The following year, I made it to the final: that felt like a significant milestone, a recognition of my progress and hard work. In 2018, I felt fully prepared and gave my best performance, ultimately winning. It remains one of the proudest moments of my early career, a true reward for all the years of practice. After that, I was invited to compete for the President's Prize, which I viewed as a valuable experience regardless of the outcome. To my surprise, I won that too!*

*While these accolades were certainly rewarding, my primary motivation for competing over the years was always personal growth. Competitions gave me clear goals to work towards, helping me stay focused and strive for higher standards. I also appreciated the opportunity to meet and be inspired by fellow competitors. I firmly believe that competitions like the North London Festival are essential for the development of young musicians."*

Claudia, winner of the Camac Harp Competition in the following year, described a very different background and motivation:

*"Having been a prize winner in more than thirty competitions during my life, it sounded 'natural' to me to try this competition as well – to keep in training! Your competition not only gave me the satisfaction of a victory, recitals at the Proms-at-St-Jude's Festival, the Harp on Wight International Festival and the NLF's Prize Concert, but also gave me the opportunity to meet for the first time the jury member Stephen Fitzpatrick, with whom I afterwards decided to complete my education at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, where he teaches. In 2020, under his mentoring, I decided to start my preparation for the largest harp competition in the world, the International Harp Contest in Israel, which I won in March 2022 ... you can imagine the joy of all this path, where one event turns out to be the happy consequence of another."*

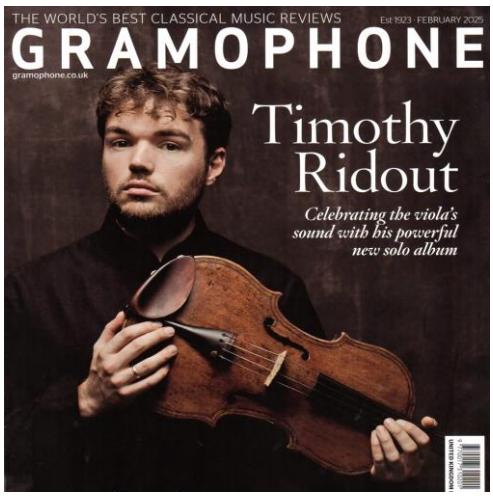
Natasha, winner of the Singing Recital Prize in 2019, had just made her debut in an opera by Jonathan Dove at Glyndebourne when she wrote:

*"I really enjoyed putting my recital programme together for the competition and the committee were so warm and welcoming. It was wonderful to sing for Joan Rodgers, who was adjudicating, and to receive her constructive and encouraging feedback.*

*"I was in my final year as a postgraduate student at the time and I was going through some vocal and technical changes, so I was really keen to have an*

*opportunity to perform outside of the music college setting to put into practice the things I'd been working on. Winning the competition gave me a huge confidence boost at a time when I wasn't feeling very confident about my vocal progress, and it reminded me of how much I love performing recital programmes. I'm very grateful to have had such a positive experience at the North London Festival.".*

Timothy, winner of the Conservatoire Viola Prize in 2014, wrote:




*"I have fond memories of taking part in the North London competition, as far as I remember it was three times. I think that when I took part in the conservatoire prize I played the Passacaglia by Biber ... I took part upon the recommendation of my teacher, Jonathan Barritt, who suggested that it would be a good opportunity to perform, which indeed it was!"*

If you have your own recollections of our Festival, and especially if you are *not* among the minority who won prizes and went into the profession (thereby giving us ways of tracking them down) then please do get in touch – just send an email to enquiriesnlf@outlook.com.

**Return to Packing List** — or read on about Places

## Section 3.0 Places

- *Where have the all the competitions been held? Some of the venues now lie derelict or have been converted to other uses, so we have assembled some notes on their architectural history, and some historic photographs.*

The first North London Festival was held in 1920 in the **Northern Polytechnic Institute, Holloway Road**. Designed by Charles Bell, FRIBA, the Institute had opened in 1896 in a late-Victorian fervour, supported by the Charity Commissioners, *"to promote the industrial skill, general knowledge, health and well-being of young men and women belonging to the poorer classes of Islington [and] to provide for the means of acquiring a sound General, Scientific, Technical and Commercial Education at small cost".*

Inevitably, much of the building was taken up by rooms dedicated to teaching craft skills such as dressmaking, millinery, cookery, woodwork, plumbing, engineering or piano repair. But the cultural needs of the manufacturing classes were not forgotten: the Great Hall , with its fine organ, could seat 1,300 and housed regular concerts and stage productions of all kinds until the rise of radio and television led audiences to dwindle. The Great Hall was refurbished somewhere around 1930, with new tip-up seats and a proscenium arch and a new name, The Theatre, and we may guess that this was what led the 1931 Festival to be the last one held there.

In 1932, the Festival moved to the **Public Halls in Prince of Wales Road, Kentish Town**, This ornate building of red brick and Doulton glazed terracotta was designed by Thomas W. Aldwinckle, a London architect who specialised in workhouses, hospitals and other public buildings, and it opened in 1901, the year of Queen Victoria's death. It had several separate entrances because it

was primarily a Public Baths, offering First and Second Class bathing facilities to both Ladies and Gentlemen, and also a Public Wash-house. However, it also boasted a Public Hall that must have been of similar size to the Great Hall at the Northern Polytechnic as entrant numbers and audience sizes had not yet declined: indeed, the peak in entrants was not reached until 1949. The building still stands, but the Public Hall is said to have been converted into residential accommodation.


From 1935 to 1972, all Festivals (even those that took place in the war years) were held in the **Archway Central Halls**, which were part of a large Art Deco complex belonging to Archway Methodist Church, designed by George E & K G Withers in 1934 and substantially funded by passionate Methodist and British film legend J. Arthur Rank. While the Church itself still flourishes, the Halls were closed and sold off in 1989 and have since fallen into disrepair, with all openings now boarded up. A Heritage Appraisal in 2014 recommended a complete reconfiguration within the existing external walls, to provide *"a mix of retail/community and residential accommodation"*. Plans were to drawn up in 2018 to demolish the historic building entirely and build a 400-capacity community and theatre space with offices above, but in 2020 these plans were blocked, on appeal, by the Planning Inspectorate. Four years later, sadly, the decay is even more evident.

As our Minute Book records end in 1968, we can only guess at the reasons (lack of entrants? lack of funding?) why in 1973 the Festival left Archway, where the helpfulness of the staff had been much praised, and was scaled down to fit into a couple of unremarkable Parish Halls in Muswell Hill before finding a new long-term home in 1978, in the **United Reformed Church, Tetherdown**, also in Muswell Hill, which was built around 1898 to a design by Percy Richard Morley Horder.

Although the seating capacity of the Tetherdown URC was much smaller than that of the earlier public halls, it was large enough for the reduced audiences of that time, and its acoustics were infinitely preferable to those of functional, low-ceilinged parish rooms. Accordingly, the Tetherdown URC became the Festival's main home for 38 years, just beating the Archway Central Halls' record. But when it was closed for a major refurbishment, following the 2016 Festival, a new home had to be found: worse, the refurbishment made it impossible ever to return because the main church space had been divided vertically, with a new low ceiling that would ruin the acoustics for any musical event.

The Festival's current home is the **Free Church, Central Square, Hampstead Garden Suburb**. It was built, like many of the Suburb's buildings, to a design by Sir Edwin Lutyens, with construction starting in 1911. Like St Jude's Church at the opposite end of Central Square (which is not square!), it is a Grade I listed building, with the added luxury (compared with previous Festival venues) of convenient free parking!

**The pages that follow** show further historic photographs of these buildings, including some of the interiors.

**The Northern Polytechnic Institute, Holloway Road**

Top: The frontage of the Institute, probably around the time of World War II.

Bottom: The Great Hall, as it was originally built and as it would have been during the first North London Musical Festivals.

**The Northern Polytechnic Institute, Holloway Road** (continued)

**Top:** The re-opening of the Great Hall in 2015 by then then Mayor of Islington, Councillor Theresa Debono, and the Vice-Chancellor, Professor John Raftery. A photograph of the hall in its original format was projected on a screen behind them.

**Bottom:** The Great Hall, as it has now been 'restored'. It retains the original ornate ceiling but with a mezzanine floor that cuts the height by half – and, of course, without choir seating or an organ.

## The Archway Central Halls, Highgate

**Top left:** The frontage of the Central Halls on St. John's Way, c. 1990

**Middle left:** An aerial view of the Halls from the East, c. 2014. Archway Road is to the right, and St. John's Way to the left.

**Bottom left:** A ground-based view from the same angle, c. 2014.

**Top right:** An historic view of the Main Hall, probably at its opening in 1934.

**Middle and bottom right:** The same view, as it stood in 2014 when the first serious attempts were made to plan a renovation. Nothing has yet been done.

## The United Reformed Church, Tetherdown

**Top left:** The church interior before the 2016 conversion (Adrian Stannard)

**Bottom left:** A children's school orchestra class at the NLF (date and photographer unknown)

**Bottom right:** The organ and pulpit before the conversion (Adrian Stannard)

**Top right:** The 'Upper Room' created by the post-2016 conversion (https://mhurc.blogspot.com/)

Return to Packing List — or read on about Pieces

## Section 4.0 Pieces (goals and choices)

- *When and why did the use of compulsory test pieces fall out of favour, gradually giving entrants more choices for self-expression?*

There seems to be a relationship, although perhaps not explicitly intended, between the slowly shifting goals of competitive music festivals over the past century and the way in which the music for performance has been chosen.

Of course, musical tastes have changed greatly over that long period. Some of today's young performers play music by living composers, as did those of the 1920s. Others choose to bring to life the music of the Renaissance, Baroque, Classical and Romantic periods, just as they have always done. But fewer of them now choose the material that dominated the first few festivals: short pieces written before World War II that are never heard outside the examination room. These little antique gems are now largely confined to a few festival classes that are directly based on ABRSM examination syllabuses: and some of them were written for exactly that purpose by teachers who later adjudicated at our own festival, such as Thomas Dunhill and Leslie Fly.

When we write of shifting goals, though, simple changes in musical taste are not what we have in mind. Two major shifts have occurred in this century of rapid worldwide change. One relates to the audiences who come to listen to festival performances: the change here has been very conspicuous, and we return to it below. The other involves subtle but important changes over that time in the priorities given by potential entrants to winning contests *versus* gaining performing experience, joining group activities such as choirs and brass bands *versus* working towards solo performance, competing as adult amateurs *versus* being entered willy-nilly as children, and receiving marks of honour such as medals and certificates *versus* cash (or cash-equivalent) prizes.

And, for would-be music professionals at least, there is the increasing role of festivals of all kinds – local, national and ultimately international – in generating feedstock for the online, publicly available, *curriculum vitae.* Indeed, the 'biographies' that such folk generally provide when you ask for one to put in the programme notes seem often to consist of little else but the names of illustrious teachers and impressive-sounding festivals. These may be of value to a potential employer but are of scant interest to concert audiences!

The several factors have all interacted in ways that are hard to unravel, but we shall take a look at some of the trends here, partly because they may help us to see how festivals like ours can be helped to survive, and partly because they

seem to throw light on a curious shift in the management of festival repertoire that has occurred, quite gradually, over the course of a century.

**Winning or taking part?**

From the very birth of competitive music festivals in the eighteenth century, those involved in establishing them have been torn between emphasising one or the other, some pioneers also expressing the view that honour and the admiration of one's peers should be their own reward, without the need for cash prizes (see "Why festivals?"). In those times, team sports (along with religion and choral societies) were the social glue that held villages together. Every schoolchild was encouraged to play for the team and not for his or her own glory. In cricket, "Play up, play up, and play the game!" was an injunction to the batsman to take the personal risk that he would be caught out, for the sake of adding a possible six to the team's score. Dogged defensive play was not considered sportsmanlike, or entertaining for those watching!

**Winning or losing?**

But this 'taking part' attitude applies primarily to team games and, in the domain of music, to choirs, where voices must blend for the 'team' to do well. When it comes to solo performance, or a small ensemble, there's a big personal component to winning – or feeling like a loser. The very word 'adjudicator' implies some kind of authoritative process of distinguishing winning sheep from losing goats.

Yet we know that the wisest (and humblest) adjudicators see it as their primary role to encourage *every* performer, even if at the end of the day someone in each class is expected to win. This, the best of breed remind us in their writings, is the key difference between a Festival Adjudicator and a Grade Examiner. The lure of a prize or certificate of merit, no less than the helpful and supportive feedback, is there to motivate performers to put in the hard yards of practice that will improve their skills; but if winning comes to dominate the performer's thinking then something has gone wrong.

**Winning or learning how to perform?**

This is why the NLF, like many other such festivals, now emphasises not the competitive aspect but the opportunities for performance experience in front of an audience, which is important in several different ways, varying with the age and status of the performer.

Many children of primary-school age are unselfconscious, and for them the main educational benefit is the motivation that an audience's praise and attention can bring. For older children who suffer from 'stage fright', the opportunity to learn how to cope with their nervousness, to perform despite it

and even to use it to add *frisson* to their playing, is perhaps even more valuable. For young, aspiring professionals, all these benefits still apply (Jeremy's mother once had to launch unbidden into the piano accompaniment to a professional violin teacher's solo to snap her out of her nervous funk!) But a final, and perhaps crucial, bonus is the opportunity to practise that two-way emotional interaction with the audience which makes all the difference between a good performance and a truly inspiring one.

**The changing role of the audience**

Ernest Fowles (1864–1932) was one of the most respected piano adjudicators of his time, and he was on the panel for the 1920 North London Festival. In his very instructive little book *Musical Competition Festivals* (1923, e-version in Appendices), he devoted a whole chapter to the importance of the audience, seeing the Great Hall-filling audiences of his time (well before the impact of 'mass media') as opportunities for public education in the arts of listening, in showing by their silent attention that they are in sympathy with the performer, in appreciating the skilled role of the music teachers of their own children, and in becoming familiar with musical genres that they might not otherwise have known – as well as their more obvious roles in providing a sounding-board for the performers and, of course, paying a substantial part of the festival's costs. It is when we read passages like this that we realise just how much has changed over the last century:

*The mass of mankind loves music with which it is familiar. This is why the programmes of our recitalists so seldom stray from the paths of convention*

Ernest Fowles, 1923

*"The audience is one of the greatest essentials to the educative success of a festival. ... Here is a number of men and women listening in silence to repeated performances of the same example of music. It is a veritable lesson in the appreciation of music. For, let us remember, the single rendering of an unfamiliar work, as at a concert, can rarely bring understanding to the vast majority of the hearers. The mass of mankind loves music with which it is familiar. This is the reason why the programmes of our recitalists so seldom stray from the paths of convention. Now, music is just the thing which will bear repeating and which, indeed, needs to be repeated again and again before it forces an entry into elementary souls. ... Unfamiliar compositions ... get their chance of public appraisement. The audience, at first unresponsive and unalert, gradually falls under the spell of the oft-repeated strains and, when the test is over, regrets that they will be heard no more. This, however, is not the only advantage which springs from the hearing of many-times-repeated music. An audience ... takes a long step towards musical discrimination; that is, it learns to distinguish between good, mediocre, and bad performance. "* (Fowles, pp12-13)

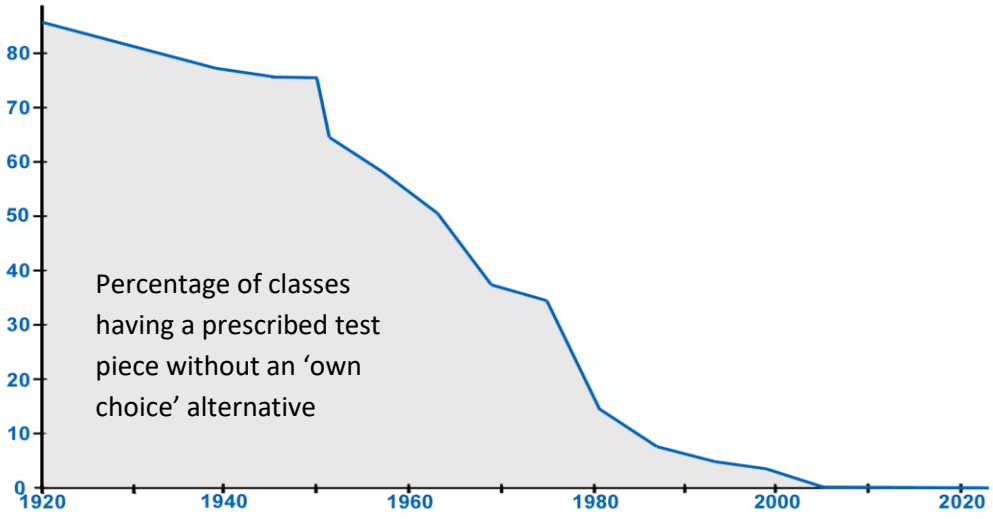
The consequences of the progressive loss of such audiences to radio and television have been considerable. The small audiences for most modern festival classes mostly consist of the parents and teachers of the performers, who no longer need educating – or so we hope. Nor do they make a large contribution to costs. Their role is to be the sympathetic listeners, the targets of 'performance', eliciting the outwardness of expression that underlies good singing or playing. Such audiences would no longer happily endure multiple performances of the same prescribed test piece, performed to highly varying standards. Which brings us back to the question of pieces, and their choice.

**Repertoire and choice**

In 1920, there were 62 competitive music classes, excluding a small number (e.g. sight-reading, scale-playing) where the performers were not asked to prepare their music in advance. Of these, 53 (86%) involved at least one prescribed Test Piece, and only three allowed an entirely free choice. By 1939, the number of classes had grown to 122, of which 94 (77%) still involved Test Pieces alone, 19 (16%) offered a degree of choice within fixed limits such as "1 from this list of 5", and only 9 (7%) offered an entirely free choice of repertoire within the general scope of the class.

> *As a child and teenager, I found that entering various categories each year enabled me to perform lots of different repertoire in public*
>
> Anna, clarinettist

Eight-four years later, In 2023, there were 124 classes, including some new instrumental categories. Of these, *none* directly prescribed the piece to be played, 13 (10%) set some limitations, either of composer or ABRSM Grade Syllabus, and 111 (90%) offered an entirely free choice, sometimes within a general category such as a period and, in the case of recitals, with the broad requirement that pieces should be contrasting.



The graph above shows how that great shift in perspective evolved. What contribution was made by each of the shifting goals discussed above, by the changing size and composition of audiences, or by changing attitudes among educationalists and music teachers, we can't say: only that festival audiences are now spared the endless, even mindless, repetition of former times, which Ernest Fowles believed was so beneficial to their musical appreciation.

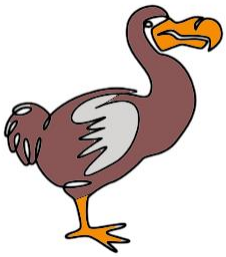
**Return to Packing List** — or read on about Prizes

## Section 5.0 Prizes

- *Unpack a century of cups, trophies, medals, certificates, cash-prizes and sponsors' vouchers. (Some of the winners are listed in Appendix 2-K).*

**Who wins a prize, and why?**

*'When they had been running half an hour or so ... the Dodo suddenly called out "The race is over!" and they all crowded round it, panting, and asking, "But who has won?" This question the Dodo could not answer without a great deal of thought, and it sat for a long time with one finger pressed upon its forehead (the position in which you usually see Shakespeare, in the pictures of him), while the rest waited in silence. At last the Dodo said, "Everybody has won, and all must have prizes."'* (Alice in Wonderland, Chapter 3).



Fortunately, adjudicators are not Dodos, or they would already be extinct. But there is an important sense in which the job of a festival adjudicator is made harder by the name of the role and the premise of a 'competitive' process.

In can be argued – and the founders of the Festival Movement did argue, as we made clear in Section 1.0 – that the primary function of the prize is not, strictly, to reward the winner, but to have brought the competitors into the ring in the first place and encouraged them to work hard on their skills and presentation. From that point on, there's a lot to be said in support of the Dodo's conclusion. Everyone who performs in front of an audience does, indeed, gain from the experience; likewise, so does everyone who receives individual, supportive, encouraging feedback from an adjudicator. Those are the real prizes, and in recent years every performer has received both a certificate of participation and a written adjudication, regardless of the competitive element.

Other prizes are no more tangible, but do depend on there being a ranking process. For those wishing to enter the music profession, the mere fact of being declared a prize-winner, with some kind of validation, is another step on the long road to a career, and another item for the c*urriculum vitae*. Yet most who enter local festivals like ours have no such aim: we cannot allow the career-focused tail to wag the friendly, music-loving, family dog. Neither is it financially practical, in the twenty-first century, for any organisation to be as lavish with the silverware as was once the case. Jeremy's mother was one of the last finalists at the Royal Academy of Music to be awarded, in 1943, a Gold Medal that was actually made of 9 carat gold: the Isabel Jay Memorial Prize For Singing (she was a coloratura soprano: Ernest Read called her "Top Fs").

The War put paid to that kind of generosity and we don't think it ever fully returned, although the NLF did continue to distribute some silver – or EPNS plate, at least – for many more years.

**How have the prizes changed?**

Right from the outset in 1920 there were always at least two forms of tangible prize. Some major competitions, particularly for choirs, awarded substantial Cups, Shields or Trophies that had to be returned by the winner in time to be re-awarded at the next Festival. Others gave smaller Challenge Shields or Silver Cups, paid for by sponsors, that became the property of the winner (with gold or silver medals as *second* prizes). Competitions for children mainly offered silver and bronze medals; and those hardy souls who formed small vocal ensembles were lucky if they got a bronze medal each! We show a handful of them here.

*1926 Gold Medal*

*1930 Silver Medal*

*1933 Silver Medal*

Interestingly, there were no cash prizes at all in 1920, or for a further 65 years. Mary Wakefield, after whom was named the Challenge Medallion for a Girls' Club Choir, would have been pleased (*see Section 1.0*). By 1939 it is notable that the names of those donating Shields and Cups were often included: their philanthropy now had a public face. Nevertheless, the Festival coffers had to fund many of the cups and shields and all, probably, of the medals, largely from the entry fees, which were no larger in real terms than they are now, mostly falling in the 5-10 shilling range (20 shillings made a pound and CPI inflation from 1920 to 2024 was about 38x).

In 1964, the humble book token made a brief appearance, as a third prize for certain singing and pianoforte competitions. Its value (5/-), though, was actually less than the entrance fee (7/6d)! A tiny cash-equivalent prize first slipped into view after decimalisation, in 1983, in the form of a Music Shop Voucher for £5.00 as third prize in a Piano Recital class that cost £3.65 to enter.

Cash became an established prize format only in 1985, when the NLF Chair, Emanuel Cedar, instituted the Emanuel Piano Trophy Competition. This is a competition of a rather different type, for which entrants must be nominated by another festival where they have won a senior prize.

From its inception, Emanuel Trophy winners have had their names engraved on this large, returnable piece of silverware, so all they got to keep was the £50 supplement. Since 1985, the cash prize value for this national competition has multiplied tenfold; but cups and medals continued to dominate other NLF competitions until the new millennium arrived.

*The Emanuel Trophy*


*1928 Silver Medal*


*1962 Bronze Medal*



*1962 Plated Medal*

At that point, in keeping with the zeitgeist of a new age, other cash prizes began to appear – at first only for Premier Challenge competitions. By 2005, commercial sponsorship by London's major suppliers of fine instruments had greatly inflated the values of such prizes, which can now reach as much as £750 for one competition where the winners perform at conservatoire levels. These financial incentives helped the NLF to bring in vitalising new blood when it was desperately needed; but they do tend to emphasize unwanted differences of purpose between the junior, overwhelmingly amateur, competitions and the senior would-be professional ones, which for a time were termed Elite, a word that reeks of ... well, elitism!

So what has happened to prizes for juniors? They still receive medals – small cast medallions plated to look like gold, silver or bronze – but nobody pretends that these have any financial value. Instead, there is usually a small cash-equivalent voucher for music purchase, instrument maintenance or whatever is appropriate from a commercial sponsor in London. From the sponsor's point of view, that is an inexpensive way of advertising their services to everyone considering entering the class. But it is not clear to us that the possibility of winning a voucher for £25 or £50 to be spent at a particular shop really offers any useful incentive to teenagers to work hard in preparing their performances once they have entered for a class, nor even whether that ought to be their aim.


*2024 'Bronze' Medal*

**Return to Packing List**