

## SIR ARTHUR BLISS AS I KNEW HIM

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There are many people who do not know that Bliss was a man of great humour. He was the archetypal jolly fellow. His moustache and bearing gave him the appearance of an unapproachable military man but that is not so. He was a friendly congenial man.

After a concert, he invited several of us to be his guests at a pub and asked us what we wanted to drink. He went to the bar and gave in his order then turned to us and said, “Who has got some money?”. It was Lady Bliss who came to his rescue.

On another occasion, and at a similar venue, he went to the bar and began sing Happy Birthday. I asked him why and he pointed to a glass case on the bar which housed some food. With a wry grin he said, “That pork pie has been there for a year. It is as stale as a Rubbra symphony!”.

I have to say that Bliss's humour was not malicious. He had a quick wit.

When he was serious, he could make statements without elaboration and one did not dare to take the matter further and he did not elucidate on any point.

There was an occasion when he had just finished an orchestral work and he was asked who he wanted to conduct the premiere.

He became uncharacteristically angry. “Anyone except Barbirolli!” he snapped.

I, being very young, wanted him to explain but I was discouraged in doing so.

Bliss was remarkable with young people including me. He taught me to value the best of music and not to be afraid to dismiss poor music as long as I had valid musical reasons. He would explain the serious weaknesses in some composers, whose names are not worthy to be mentioned here.

He had respect for many contemporary composers and asserted that many were better than the old school. He lamented the promotion particularly by the BBC of awfully boring British composers and was very pleased that Glock, in his days at the BBC, championed British composers who still wrote tonal music.

“No one could replace Glock”, he told me.

Bliss was a true Englishman... loyal to the Queen, whom he genuinely admired, and he was true to his country and yet he was never a toady.

One could not help but like him.