

WILLIAM GLOCK – The Saviour of the Promenade Concerts

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In another account of William Glock, I refuted, with ample evidence, the lies perpetrated by some that he neglected and ignored the works of tonal British composers in favour of avant garde works and other experimental music. People like Lewis Foreman and Paul R W Jackson have carried on this myth.

Glock was the Controller of Music at the BBC from 1959-1971/2.

He has also been unfairly criticised for the music he presented at the Proms but, again, this criticism is unfair. Whoever is responsible for the content of the Proms will be criticised. Since his death BBC Controllers have deliberately refused to broadcast many composers.



But the Proms during the 1950s were receiving a lot of criticism.

They were consisting of the same classical repertoire, were too predictable and new music was being ignored. The committee for the Proms had become redolent and they were noted for repeated and noted for containing too much repetition and no adventure. They were stuck in a rut. Attendances were falling and so was the income that was expected. Sargent complained that the hall was less than half full for a concert of favourites by Handel, Haydn and Beethoven. Standard repertoire was no longer eagerly awaited. Things were changing.

When Sir William Glock took over the Proms things had to be different or the concerts would run at a loss and that could be the end of the Proms. He decided to include as wide a range as possible of music including new music from Europe. There was no future in the standard programmes of all the symphonies and concertos of Beethoven and Brahms, or a healthy selection of them, to be played in a single season and such programmes were not putting bums on seats. If the Proms were to survive they had to change.

Glock's innovations were the salvation of the Proms. A wider repertoire resulted in more soloists and different orchestras. In 1959 there were 26 new works at the Proms but they were not all modern. In fact most of them were conventional in sound and style. Audiences began to pick up. There were new faces and exciting new talent. Glock juxtaposed new works with the works of the masters and while they are still people who falsely say that Glock favoured the avant garde and experimental music, which is not true, the fact is that attendances rose dramatically and the income increased to make the Proms a financial success whereas they had been running at a considerable loss.

For my first Prom season in the early 1960s the change was gradually taking place. A concert of Schubert and Mozart had an almost empty hall and tickets on the night were being offered at a very minimal price. On the night of Messaien, Boulez and Debussy the hall was packed. An evening of Beethoven was poorly attended but each time there was a new work the audiences had increased, sometimes to overflowing. People looked forward to new works. Bruno Maderna was one composer that resulted in a full house. I know. I was there.

Glock brought Glyndebourne Opera to the Proms in 1961 with Don Giovanni in 1961 followed in successive years by *Così fan tutte* and *The Marriage of Figaro*. There was also Schoenberg's amazing opera *Moses and Aaron* in 1965 and Berlioz's *Benevenuto Cellini* in 1972 which Glock had been setting up for a few years. The third act of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* appeared in 1963 and acts from *Die Walküre*, *Parisfälsch*, *Tristan and Siegfried* were also presented.

He also rectified the appalling lack of pre-classical music with such works as Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppea*. We also had composers like Dufay and Machaut and David Munrow and his early music consort.

Glock brought to the Proms the BBC Symphony, the LSO, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House.

New singers included Janet Baker, Joan Carlyle, Marie Collier, Teresa Berganza, Gerald English, Ronald Dowd, Raymond Herinck, Hermann Prey, John Shirley -Quirk, Montserrat Caballe, Jeannette Sinclair, Anne Howells, Yvonne Minton, Josephine Nendick, Ian Partridge, Margaret Price, Gerard Souzay, Robert Tear, Shelia Armstrong, Ryland Davies, Patricia Kern, Christopher Keyte, Anne Pashley, Elly Ameling, Janet Price, Stuart Burrows, Jill Gomez, Jane Manning, Nicolai Gedda and Elisabeth Soderstrom.

New instrumentalists included Sergio Varella-Cid, Halina Czerny-Stemfanska, Jorg Demus, Ingrid Haebler, the Kontarsky brothers, Charles Rosen, Henryk Szerying, Peter Wallfisch, Janet Craxton, Katharina Wolpe, Mindru Katz, Gary Graffman Tamas Vasary, Geza Anda, David Wilde, Stephen Bishop, Jacqueline Du Pre, Vlado Perlemuter, Simon Preston, Martha Argerich, Daniel Barenboim, Heinz Hollinger, Alfred Brendel Vladimir Orloff, Siegfried Palm, Gyorgy Pauk, Leonard Rose, Isaac Stern, Eva Bernathova, Emil Gilels, John Lill, Judith Pearce, Anthony Goldstone, Pinchas Zukerman, Kyung Wha Chung, Alicia de Larrocha and Gillian Weir.

The Proms launched the international careers of many of these performers and many of us owe Glock a debt we cannot pay for allowing us to witness these incredible new performers.

The list of 'new' conductors was also impressive but I will not list them here as the above lists are sufficient to prove the point that Glock made the provincial Proms into an international music festival.

The list of works by living British composers in a traditional, tonal and non-experimental style is considerable. Such composers represented by Glock but not necessarily at the Proms included Anthony Milner, Malcolm Williamson, Iain Hamilton's tonal works, Walton, Britten, Maxwell Davies, Nicholas Maw, Thea Musgrave, Alan Rawsthorne, Lennox Berkeley, Gerhard's early tonal works, Tippett, Francis Burt, Bernard Naylor, William Alwyn, Richard Rodney Bennett, Gordon Crosse, Edmund Rubbra, Egon Wellesz, Robert Simpson, Thomas Wilson, John Taverner, Malcolm Arnold, Bliss, Alan Bush, Wilfrid Mellers, Hugh Wood, Arnold Cooke, George Newsom and Priaulx Rainier.

Due to broadcasts made by Glock I was introduced to Rubbra, Szymanowski and Kenneth Leighton and for people to say he ignored these composers is a lie born of ignorance or deception to discredit Glock. There are some writers and alleged musicologists who have written that Glock refused to broadcast any works of these composers.

The majority of British works that Glock advanced were tonal centred. They were not avant garde or experimental since they were nothing like the works of Stockhausen and John Cage whose work did make a few appearances at the Proms.

The standard repertoire was not neglected. However, for one season, *Land of Hope and Glory* and *Rule Britannia* were dropped, which caused a furore but they were reinstated the following year.

It is noted that on average, 52 new works per season nearly half of them were by twentieth century composers. Of these there were, on average, only four by living British composers and in thirteen years there were very few experimental and avant garde British works, if any. The comparatively few avant garde and experimental works were, as we have said, from Europe with Stockhausen, Nono and Boulez and, from the USA, John Cage. What aleatory or comparative works by British composers were put on?

Glock introduced chamber music and instrumental music such as Paul Crossley playing Tippett. In 1970 there was a strange group, The Soft Machine, in a late night Prom playing Tim Souster's Triple Music II which may be the only experimental British work in the Glock era.

The idea that Glock ignored and neglected tonal British works in his thirteen years at the BBC is without foundation. One could argue that he could have put on works by Butterworth, Gipps, Veale et al at the Proms but no one can promote every composer and it must be remembered that there was a Proms committee which discussed works to be played and Glock was a part of that committee. We are aware of many times when his advocacy of some British composers was over ruled.

We should be grateful to Glock for the amazing achievements he did make and how he saved the Proms by brilliant and innovative ideas. For example many of the new works he introduced have become popular standard works. He introduced the Proms to the symphonies of Sibelius when Sibelius was not well known.

He introduced new works by Shostakovich and Stravinsky now universally admired. Schoenberg's glorious Transfigured Night had an extensive ovation, Berwald was discovered by the Prommers, we had symphonies by Mahler and the Bruckner Masses, Walton's superior Symphony no. 2, Gabrieli, Berlioz's Damnation of Faust, Handel's Israel in Egypt and Alexander's Feast, Monteverdi's Vespers, Glazunov's Violin Concerto and Delius's Mass of Life

Glock was succeeded by Robert Ponsonby and John Drummond but they were not musicians as was Glock who had studied with Schnabel and played the piano in a Prom in 1940. Ponsonby and Drummond certainly did not establish tonal and traditional sounding British music at the Proms or on the BBC in their respective administrations whereas Glock did all that he could and yet it is Glock who is falsely accused and criticised for the neglect of tonal British composers who lives and career he is said to have ruined.

As for the late Sir John Drummond there were conventional British composers that he deliberately and vehemently prevented from having performances.

Glock had vision and made London the musical capital of the world. That cannot be gainsaid and it is time that all this cruel and nonsense about him was rectified and the Lewis Foremans and Paul Jacksons of this world, and others, came clean and put right their scurrilous attacks on a fine musician and devoted servant of music and admitted that they were and are wrong as, indeed, they are.

(1632)