

ADRIAN CRUFT

David C F Wright DMus

Adrian Cruft was born on 10 February 1921, the son of the double bass player, Eugene Cruft (1887-1976).

Adrian was educated at the Westminster Abbey Choir School and at Westminster School. He studied the double bass with his father, composition with Gordon Jacob and Edmund Rubbra and conducting with Adrian Boult at RCM. Cruft was the Chairman of the Composers Guild from 1966.

He died on the 20 February 1987. He was 66.

His first work was Hommage to J S Bach written while he was still at college and before the war when he joined the Army. His Opus 2 was a Fantasy for oboe and string trio first performed at Chelsea Town Hall. His Fanfares were written in 1948 for the freemason fraternity although Cruft was not a mason.

He was never really an orchestral composer although he wrote his Partita for small orchestra Op 7 which won the Royal Philharmonic Prize and the Interlude Op 8 for string orchestra. Then followed his first big work, the Overture Acteon in 1952, Op 9.

He was conducting the choir of the Purcell Club and wrote choral pieces. This is the male voice choir of Westminster Abbey's old choristers and some songs included women, One song is Against Love which highlights the treachery of some women and another song, Farewell Ungrateful Traitor deals with the women getting their own back. Cruft had a dry sense of humour.

Frederick Thurston was the clarinettist of the day and gave Cruft some lesson which resulted in a pithy Concertino for clarinet and strings Op 21 which Sidney Fell premiered and it was dedicated to Gordon Jacob on his 60th birthday. Then there was the Concertante for flute, oboe and strings Op 25.

Adrian rejected the symphony and concerto genres thinking that they were irrelevant for the modern day. That was a pity for had he written in these forms his music might have become better known.

The Divertissement for full orchestra Op 28 is a suite from the music of his only ballet originally entitled Sweet Echo.

He later wrote an Overture Prospero's Island, chosen by Jack Lanchberry to recommend to Kenneth MacMillan who did not take it up in a proposed series of six works for brief ballets.

Choral works followed such as Great is the Lord for the St Cecilia Festival of 1960. Run, shepherds run was performed in the awful acoustics of St Paul's cathedral, There was a Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis for the Cheltenham Festival. The Gloucester Te Deum was commissioned by the London Orpheus Choir for the silver wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester. I brought thee love was written for the Elizabethan Singers and Louis Halsey. The Tamberlane Overture was written for the Civil Service Orchestra and conducted by Denys Darlow and made up of suggested pieces for the Marlow play Tamberlane which came to nothing.

The Divertimento for strings is a serious light piece not to be compared to Bartok. The Latin Te Deum was written for Westminster School and the Chelmsford Benedictus Op 45 was written for the jubilee of the cathedral. Jubilate for choir and brass was written for the Tower of London choir.

The Elegy for horn and strings was written in memory of Denis Brain who was also born in 1921 and also had a brother, John (1914-2008) who played the oboe.

The Hymn of Heavenly Love was written for the 1968 Warwick Festival and is probably Cruft's most substantial work. The Annunciation was written for Denys Darlow at Tilford and is a chamber canata. The Two Canadian poems to words by Lloyd Roberts have been broadcast. Cruft spent a week in Toronto and two weeks crossing Canada.

Stratford Music is about three relationships, the place in Ontario where Cruft heard Canadian music and saw a version of Romeo and Juliet, Stratford on Avon and Stratford Place where the offices of the Composers Guild were situated.

He wrote many teaching pieces for double bass and piano. Charms against Spirits Op 63 was written for Southend's Boys Choir who also performed The Horse Trough Op 76. The Luthernian Mass has only a Kyrie and a Gloria, Op 64, and is for unaccompanied double choir. The Clarinet Duo Op 67 was soon followed by the Organ Suite Op 69. The Mediation on the Passion Chorale suited the composer who is not cheerful as some are. The Arts Council commissioned the song cycle, Songs of a Good Counsel.

Cruft's mother died in 1973 and Memorial was written in her memory, Lucerne Music was written for the Philip Jones' Brass Ensemble and Into God's Kingdom Op 80 is a sacred song for baritone which Brian Rayner Cook performed excellently.

Edmund Rubbra was asked for a piece for the Cork Festival but was unwell and so Cruft was contacted. He wrote Medieval Prayers Op 82 and the following year, Two Part songs Op 83.

Eatonswill Election, a vaudeville opera, Op 84 was commissioned by the Southend Boys Choir and two works for band followed, Essay on a Phrase Op 85, and Three Variations Op 90. Between these works came My Duke of Cambridge Suite Op 88 commissioned by Kneller Hall. Dr Syn Op 89 is an operina

The death of Rubbra distressed Cruft very much.

Cruft's music has never caught on or had a champion and that is a pity. His music may not have originality or a personal voice and may be anachronistic. Some have said his music may show Tudor influences and some influences of J S Bach.

(935)

© COPYRIGHT David C F Wright DMus 1990 – This article or any part of it, however small, must not be copied, quoted, reproduced, downloaded or altered in any way whatsoever nor stored in any retrieval system. Failure to comply is in breach of International Copyright Law and will render any offender liable to action at law.

Ref: WM17-6