



Stepping into spring with Sean



Sean Rea's superb bass voice was "discovered" for the first time by Vic Oliver, when at the age of 19 he won a scholarship to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama to study singing, with trumpet as second study, as he had been a Salvation Army principal cornet player when a teenager.

Having a young family to support, Sean made his living in cosmetic dental laboratory work, eventually running his own business in Harley Street. Meanwhile he kept busy as a singer; becoming a regular soloist with the BBC in the 70s and later singing principal roles for Glyndebourne, such as Pistol in *Falstaff* and the Major-Domo in *Capriccio*.

Sean's singing voice was "discovered" for the second time when Lord Harewood heard him at the Brighton Festival in the late 70s. He was immediately invited to join English National Opera, where he was a Principal Bass from 1980 to 1984. Among the roles he performed were Sarastro in *The Magic Flute* (we shall hear it on 25th March) and the Commendatore in Don

FULL CIRCLE: Sean Rea is now living in Castle Douglas and sings for "fun and relaxation".

Welcome to the spring edition of our newsletter. We are very much looking forward to our main concert at 7.30pm on 25th March in St Cuthbert's Church, Kirkcudbright. The programme is an entertaining mixture of music from *Schubert's 3rd Symphony* to some delightful orchestrations by Helen Keating of piano pieces by Gabriel Grovlez. A strong local flavour is provided by the inclusion of two movements from a suite by Kirkcudbright-born composer, Cecil Coles (1888-1918), and also by our soloist, bass singer, Sean Rea from Castle Douglas, who will be performing arias from the *Magic Flute*.

Giovanni. Sean went on to sing principal roles at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, with Opera North, and in France and Germany. Meanwhile his concert work included performances such as the Verdi *Requiem* and Handel's *Messiah* at the Royal Albert Hall, the Festival Hall, and as far afield as Canada, Norway, the Arab Emirates, Sri Lanka and Thailand. He has also made numerous recordings for the BBC including

much light music for programmes like Ring up the Curtain and Friday Night is Music Night, and has recorded *Otello* with Charles Craig and *Das klagende Lied* with Sir Simon Rattle on the EMI label. Sean took the decision, after a brief illness, to reduce his singing commitments, and for 12 years lived on the Isle of Man, where for five years he was artistic director for a professional company, Island Opera. His next move was to

Cumbria, where he directed a small opera company, sang in many concerts both light and classical, and had considerable success as a singing teacher.

The wheel has turned full circle with Sean's recent move to Castle Douglas, where he is once again practising cosmetic dentistry, and singing "for fun and relaxation". The Solway Sinfonia is hugely privileged to accompany a singer of such stature.

Cecil Coles was born in Kirkcudbright in 1888, the son of Frederic Rhenius Coles, who was one of the "Kirkcudbright Artists". His early years were spent at Tongland and at George Watson's College.

His musical talent became apparent from an early age and he entered Edinburgh University as a music student when he was 16. He then won a Cherubini scholarship at the London College of Music, having spotted the announcement in a newspaper wrapped around a pair of shoes he had collected from the cobbler.

Alone and penniless in London, he joined the orchestra of Morley College, and found himself studying alongside another composer, Gustav Holst, who became a lifelong friend and supporter. In 1908 Coles won another scholarship, to study in Stuttgart, and from 1911 to 1913 he was assistant conductor at the Stuttgart Royal Opera.

For a 23-year-old Scot this was a remarkable achievement. Back in Britain, in the years before the war, he began to achieve growing recognition to the point where he was noticed by Henry Wood, the founder of the Proms. In June 1914 he was invited to conduct his own composition, *Fra Giacomo*, a powerful work for baritone and orchestra. This

In praise of a local hero



excited the Times' music critic to such an extent that he hailed the arrival of a brilliant new composer on the London musical scene.

Following the declaration of war, Coles felt that he had to volunteer, and was sent to Flanders as a stretcher-bearer, generally regarded as one of the most dangerous of all assignments, constantly exposed to enemy shelling. Even under these conditions, he continued to compose. On 26th April, 1918, Coles volunteered to rescue some wounded men from a wood, and was killed by a German sniper as he was carrying one of them back to the lines.

This extraordinary man might have been forgotten had it not been for the tenacity of his daughter, Penny Catherine Coles. She knew nothing of Coles' work until her long-estranged brother, who was dying of cancer, and had decided to tell her more about the father she had never known, telephoned her. He told her not only about their father's life, but also of the existence of some manuscripts which had been deposited in Edinburgh at George Watson's College, where Coles had been a pupil.

She tracked them down, and, after a lengthy legal wrangle, ensured that the manuscripts, some still spattered with the

shrapnel and mud of the Somme, were donated to the National Library of Scotland.

The musical world is indebted to Martyn Brabbins, who, on reading the manuscripts, realised the true extent of Coles' creative genius. He was amazed at the quality of what he found. "This was clearly a huge talent cut down before its prime," he said.

In 1999, he and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra gave what was in effect the world première of Coles' orchestral suite, *Behind the Lines*. And they have also recorded a full CD of Coles' music under the same title on the Hyperion label.



Geoff Keating lecture

Geoff Keating will be giving a lecture at 2pm on Thursday 22nd March in Gatehouse Parish Church hall under the aegis of the Crichton University Support Group. Tickets cost £6 and are available from Mary Cousins, 01557 814027 or

at the door. Geoff will be covering the music to be played at the concert. These lectures are popular and are an excellent introduction to some of the less familiar music as well as enlightening us about the old favourites.

Exciting programme of events throughout the year

May 20 (Sunday), 7.30pm, Threave Gardens Visitor Centre. Musical party for patrons, sponsors, orchestra members and their families.

May 27 (Sunday), 7.30pm, St Ninian's Church, Castle Douglas. Concert of chamber music by the Solway Sinfonietta in support of Christian Aid.

June 10 (Sunday), 7.30pm, at St Mary's Church, Wreay, Cumbria. Concert of chamber music by the Solway Sinfonietta in support of the church's roof restoration fund.

November 25 (Sunday), 7.30pm, at Easterbrook Hall, Dumfries. Solway Sinfonia Autumn Concert.

