



Musical Heroes: A Personal View of Music and the Musical World Over Sixty Years

Robert Ponsonby

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Robert Ponsonby has been at the centre of the music world both in Britain and elsewhere for some sixty years, and *Musical Heroes* is a distillation of his experiences, achievements and friendships in that world. With its deft touch and its empathy, it is both captivating and inspiring, and it is often full of humour. It paints portraits in many formats of the fifty or so figures he knew best, including conductors, composers, performers and administrators: Boult, Beecham, Giulini, Pritchard, Kubelik, Boulez, Walton, Tippett, Berio, Ligeti, Henze, Menuhin, Sena Jurinac, Rostropovich, Jacqueline du Pré, John Ogdon, William Glock, John Drummond, Thomas Armstrong and Robert Mayer are some of those featured. There has been a widespread renaissance in the appreciation of classical music in the past few years, above all among talented young musicians and composers and in schools, where music is now taught systematically. *Musical Heroes* will therefore have a wide appeal not only among established lovers of classical music but also among people who have discovered it for themselves more recently. There is probably more active music-making in Britain today than there has ever been, and concerts in all parts of the country are often packed out. Dame Janet Baker in her introduction: 'One of the truly great privileges is to spend one's working life among charismatic, interesting and gifted people. It has clearly been the experience of Robert Ponsonby during his many years of artistic administration and he writes about it with obvious delight...How refreshing...to read [his] collection of portraits which steer such a well-judged course between the light and darker sides of the human condition and give us a balanced picture of his subjects. He has a delightful turn of phrase and describes aspects of character which I found immediately recognizable and true. It is all done with wit, perception, kindness, honesty, affection and humour, leaving this reader wanting more.' Bryce Morrison in *The Gramophone*: 'This delightful book by one of music's most admired administrators is perfectly summarised by Dame Janet Baker...in her characteristically warm-hearted introduction... Throughout [the book] there is an often moving wish to share a lifetime of involvement and dedication to the arts; to celebrate true greatness and to disparage many more recent attitudes and events. Ponsonby takes a sharp sword to the ever-threatening forces of philistinism...There is a superb chapter on Boulez's approach to the whole nature of conducting...[His] warmth and candour shine through at every point...' Kenneth Walton in *The Scotsman*: 'Robert Ponsonby's newly published memoirs, *Musical Heroes*, are not so much a self-promotional nostalgia trip as a generous testament to the many classical music celebrities he has encountered over half a century as one of the UK's leading arts supremos. At the core of this book are generous personal reflections on family friend Sir Adrian Boult, the irascible Sir William Walton, such legendary performers and composers as Jacqueline du Pré (photographed informally in his Glasgow flat with Daniel Barenboim and former SNO leader Sam Bor playing piano trios), Yehudi Menuhin, John Ogden, Pierre Boulez, Michael Tippett and many more.' Andrew Clark in *FT* critic's 'hottest holiday reading': 'Ponsonby's essays sum up a golden era of music-making. He gives us fly-on-the-wall portraits of the great musicians he knew in the course of a postwar career that took him from directing the Edinburgh Festival to the BBC Proms.' Michael Church in *Classical Music* (four stars): '...His obituary of Kent Opera – killed by the Arts Council because it didn't fit its popularising plans – is a fitting homage to that groundbreaking institution, and his article for the *Times* on running the Proms is a more cogent apologia than we have ever had from his successors...along the way we get a lovely gallery of portraits, from Walton to Henze and Berio, sweet Sidonie Goossens

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