

Loving serenade for June

By John Smith

There will have been many occasions during the past 60 years when June, Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair, will have rejoiced at being the centre of attention at Haddo House Hall, from the first carol concerts to the light choral offerings, the grand opera, the many great names she has introduced to the North east, not least Dame Janet baker, Benjamin Britten and sir Charles Groves.

But I would wager the tribute concert organised by Haddo Junior choirs as a thank you on Sunday would rank very high in her treasured memories.

HHCOS opened up proceedings with the appropriately named 'Tonight' from 'West Side Story' followed by the beautiful anthem 'Lord of Our Fathers'. They later had fun with 'Italian salad.'

Looking very elegant in their purple dresses, the Youth Choir sang a medley which included Britten's 'Bululalow' and Ivor Novello's 'On Wings of Song'. In keeping with their own tradition for trail blazing, accompanist and composer Jerry Dennis gave the familiar 'Ave Maria' and new interpretation which went down very well with audience.

The youngsters later went on the sing the 'Lovely Lass of Inverness', and with even more feeling, if that were possible, noted that 'Diamonds are a Girls Best Friend'.

The 45 strong Children's Choir was not to be outdone by their seniors, and entranced the packed hall with tales of cheeky cats, of clouds and Russian lullabies. Their sheer enthusiasm is matched by a quality of singing that must have cheered their current

director Alice Dennis enormously.

Whether by design or chance the cheery Jewish air 'Hine Ma Tov' just felt right the night before holocaust day.

Interspersing the choirs efforts a number of soloists showed their colours. Old favourites like 'Somewhere over the Rainbow' (Lindsey Robinson) and very modern items 'Loose Ends' from the Witches of Eastwick (Lisa Ross) and 'Colours of the Wind' from Pocohontas (Emma Rettie) were very well received.

Showing no traces of nerves the very young Victoria Ross and Sian O'Brien sang 'Maybe' from Annie, and 'Someday' from the Hunchback of Notre Dame respectively. G and S's entertaining 'Sentry's song' from Iolanthe, was given by Kris Bruce.

Cero Kindly from HHCOS led off the soloists with Mozart's 'Alleluia' and guesting on the night Scott Armstrong gave a rather good rendition of 'Where 'ere you Walk' by Handel.

The final soloist was the impressive Eleanor Dennis who rend 'Michaela's Aria' from 'Carmen', with considerable emotion. For a rousing finale all the choirs sang out Vivaldi's 'Gloria'.

Sixty years ago, June Gordon could not have imagined standing in front of the adoring audience on this day. Though now frail in body her spirit is totally undimmed and her message to the audience and the wider community was: "Don't let the music stop".

If the youngsters and the current leaders have any say in the matter it will not. Such events as this one showed the way.

90th year Tribute to Lady Aberdeen, Haddo House Hall, Sunday 26th Jan 2003.

REVIEW by Dr. Michael Radcliffe

A magnificent and heart-felt tribute was paid to Lady Aberdeen last Sunday in the wonderful setting of Haddo House Hall by the gathered ranks of **Haddo Children's Choir**, the **Haddo Youth Choir** and members from the **Haddo House Choral and Operatic Society** – over one hundred singers in all, aged from 7 – 70.

The sparkling performance to a packed hall ranged over the full gamut of emotions and styles under the expressive and inspirational direction of Alice Dennis, who has been the chorus master of the award winning Junior Choirs as a volunteer for the past eleven years.

The seventy five minute programme comprised five songs from each of the young choirs, and three from the HHCOS, interspersed with solo items performed by past and present members. The uplifting finale – the *Gloria* from Vivaldi's *Gloria* – was performed with fitting celebratory fervour by the amassed choirs.

The Children's Choir showed remarkable discipline for such young performers. The highly evocative performance of M. Phillip's *Silent Mill*, coupled with the exuberance of

A. Naplan's *Hine ma Tov* deserve special praise.

Among the beautifully balanced pieces performed by the Youth Choir was a new setting of the *Ave Maria* by Jerry Dennis – who has been the two young Choirs accompanist throughout. The stirring and confident performance of Somervell's *The Lovely Lass of Inverness* marked this as the Choir's firm favourite.

The Senior Choir introduced the programme appropriately with Bernstein's classic number *Tonight* from *West Side Story* and later performed R. Genee's *Italian Salad* with all the gusto demanded by this terminologically challenging piece.

In short, the evening was a tremendous recognition of the remarkable stimulus that Lady Aberdeen has given to amateur and professional music in the Northeast since forming the original HHCOS with her (now late) husband in 1945. The concert showed that the creative energy she released will remain in force among young and old alike, thanks to the talent and enthusiasm of those who are taking up her baton.