

Concerts go far better if there's a voluntary body running them

Jim Noble was born in 1913 and interviewed In 1994

I went to school in 1916, in those days they took you into school when you were three years old. Kirkland School was on that triangular piece of land near the Parish Church built by Arch Deacon Cooper in 1958.

My musical career began, fortunately, as a chorister in the Parish Church when I was seven years old and I am still connected to the church. In the interim I have been deputy organist, organist, choirmaster and that has had a big effect on my life.

I was interested in music and singing from the age of five. Apparently, so they tell me, I was the best boy in Kirkland School for singing, as I was at Stramongate- I got a music prize there. I was playing services on what is a big organ in the Parish Church when I was barely 13. I have never known it to be difficult. I just fell for it. I used to take choirboy practices during the week and then play the services on the Sunday. I can remember the then organist, Mr Paul Rochard, said to me "Listen my boy. If anyone tells me when I come back from holiday that you've made a mess of the services you'll never play again."

I learned the piano very quickly and I wanted to do more and more and I got a lot of chance of playing when I got into my teens as accompanist at concerts for singers and that was probably one of the best foundations I had because it brought me in touch with people. Too many people who play get very little chance to show what they can do. I have a diploma – one of the very few – LRAM Diploma as an accompanist which is a very difficult examination to pass.

My teacher was a man called Paul Rochard and he was considered by some as a tyrant. Once I started playing a C Sharp Minor Prelude by Chopin and I'd gone about four bars and he said "Stop. How far have you gone in this piece my boy?" "Well I've gone through to the end sir!" and he said "Always remember in music, if you are to be any good, you never play bar two until you can play bar one properly" and he came over and closed the book and said "I'll see you in a fortnight's time." and that was the lesson! I came home a cried a lot of the night and my parents were in half a mind to stop me having any more lessons. My father said to me "You are moving along very well and then somebody trips you up. We have decided we'll continue with your lessons, but if you're unhappy after this we'll consider what we should do." He must have spoken to Paul Rochard because he never said another word to me.

Music in the early days was largely Mary Wakefield and the Kendal Choral Society which was 150 strong. It used to be conducted for many years by John Smallwood Winder who was related to the famous man who wrote 'The Smallwood Tutor for Pianists' he lived at Heathfield on Sedbergh Road and I used to go to tea every Friday. He was a keen violinist in his latter years, and we used to play one or two sonatas for violin and piano either by Beethoven or Mozart. Of course that was a marvellous thing for my musical career.

Mary Wakefield Festival started at Sedgwick in 1885. It quickly moved to Kendal. The Drill Hall was used for a time for the Festival and then St. George's Hall. Then of course St. Georges Hall was taken over by bingo and it finished up in the Leisure Centre. I've always thought that it was a great pity that Kendal Town Council, when St Georges Hall was offered to it with the Lower Hall for £34,000 that they didn't buy it.

When I was elected on to the Council, the first meeting I attended, I was voted on to the Leisure and Tourism Committee with specific to look to the Leisure Centre which came the development it was to be. I led a demand for public subscription to provide a concert hall piano. I was founder of the Westmorland Music Council from which the Midday Concerts were born and it was through the Westmorland Music Council ultimately that the piano was bought.

I insisted from the word "go" that the concerts must not be run by the council. I said "If it is left to council officials they will die and the concerts will die." Concerts go far better if there's a voluntary

body with lots of workers and keen enthusiastic people are given the responsibility of running them and if there's any profit to be taken after paying running expenses they take the profit. I don't believe in councils being responsible for those sort of things. If you make councils responsible for anything that has to do with art it won't take long before it dies

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