

GEOFFREY HANSON

9 DECEMBER 1939 – 21 JULY 2020

We are here, in person and online, to say goodbye to Geoffrey, Geoff: a dear, generous and kind brother, uncle, companion and friend.

Geoffrey was born in Eastbourne in 1939, to Grace and John, a brother to Alan and John.

He was a bright child who showed an early gift for music. He started learning the piano at five – despite the absence of one in the family home – and soon moved on to the organ. He was a boy chorister. He studied at Trinity College of Music.

At Trinity, he met and married Jan. After their ways parted, Maureen became his partner for 30 years, and he became a friend and adviser to Matthew and Nancy.

Geoffrey enjoyed a long career as an organist, teacher, and composer. His first appointment as church organist was at the age of 17. He became organist at St Mark's Regent's Park in 1964, and then came to All Saints' here in East Finchley in 1986. He fortuitously contacted the vicar the day the previous organist resigned, and played the organ and led the choir there for 30 years.

In 1964 he became a professor at Trinity College, and from 1970 director of music at the Polytechnic

of Central London, now the University of Westminster

He founded and conducted the London Ripieno Society in 1962, and the Square Singers of St James, and he established the annual East Finchley Arts Festival in 1997.

Geoffrey was a prolific and talented composer. He composed in all genres: organ music, masses, anthems, songs, chamber music, choral and orchestral works, concertos, operas. All were written for choirs, orchestras and friends, who gave the first performances. It was always a joy in the All Saints' choir to find Geoffrey had written a new piece for us, or for the Ripieno Singers to premiere a major work.

Geoffrey was one of those composers who have a distinctive voice: you could instantly recognise his music from just a short passage.

He also had a gift for finding poems to set to music: for example, John Donne's "Death Be Not Proud", which will be read after this, and Siegfried Sassoon's "Everyone Sang", which we will hear at the end.

We love his music, and he had many admirers and champions. The London Mozart Players premiered many of his works. But he was always rather self-critical. During rehearsals it would be "This music is terrible. No one will come". But the music was

far from terrible, and people came, pouring through the doors of All Saints for his memorable 80th birthday concert last December. We are so lucky that he made his recording “Odyssey” for us to treasure his music by.

He was composing up to the end: on his piano we found a Sinfonia in which he had crossed out the original Allegro and written “Largo pomposo”.

But Geoffrey was far from pompous. He had a great gift for friendship, from his earliest college days, and making new friends throughout his life. I am honoured that that included me. Many of his former students and choir members kept in touch with him over the years. He understood people so well: Matthew still remembers the advice Geoffrey gave him when he was puzzling about career choices: “I think you are a people person and should remember that.” Matthew now works with people all the time as an osteopath.

I shall miss our weekly meetings for coffee, latterly over Skype, where the discussion ranged over anything and everything: music, politics, the – often rather fruity - lives of famous organists, pulling down statues, the birds who came into his garden - a garden full of colour thanks to Nancy’s loving care - and how proud he was of Maureen’s singing career, and going to Glyndebourne to hear her.

Geoffrey lived in East Finchley for many years, first in Fordington Road with lodgers, pianos and corgis, and then in his flat in New Ash Close, surrounded by music, antiques, books, pictures, and clocks.

Geoffrey approached his last years with great resilience. He had a progressive, and incurable, condition, which weakened him considerably, but he was determined not to let it defeat him. When walking became impossible, he bought an electric buggy, and charged around East Finchley on it. This was not without its hazards: since Geoffrey had never learnt to drive, he had no idea how to manoeuvre, and was utterly unaware of what mirrors are for – despite having been an organist for many years, using a mirror to watch the priest. He caused mayhem in a local coffee shop and the Festival art exhibition.

One of the comments sent to us about Geoffrey was “I will remember him as a gentle man with what I think was a steely resolve to get things done as he saw fit”. We all saw that resolve in his musical direction and leadership. He certainly had a clear vision of what he wanted. He is the only person known to Barnet Council to have turned down having a new bathroom at the Council’s expense, because they wouldn’t lay it out in what he saw as the right places.

We have so much to be thankful to Geoffrey for: for coming into our lives, for writing music for us, for being such delightful company. Maureen's family particularly remember his laughing, and his kind consideration: for example, always offering Maureen the last piece of chocolate. As another put it, "he was such a lovely twinkly man". We shall miss the kindness, the warmth, the sense of humour – even the occasional irascibility. We will all remember him - over a glass of wine, or, perhaps, a chocolate.

Goodbye Geoffrey, Geoff, from all of us here and online, and those who can't be here: a greatly loved brother, uncle, companion and dear friend.