

UK orchestras honour Sir Neville Marriner and late Vernon Handley CBE

Association of British Orchestras Annual Conference
26 February, National Museum Wales, Cardiff

The UK's professional orchestras will pay tribute to two great British conductors for their outstanding contributions to classical music and the orchestral world in particular. The prestigious ABO Award for 2008 will be presented to Sir Neville Marriner while the late Vernon Handley CBE will be honoured with a Special Posthumous Award at the Association of British Orchestras (ABO) Annual Conference on 26 February.

Timothy Walker, Chairman of the ABO, said:

“With this award we celebrate the overwhelming contribution of two titans of the British orchestral world. Sir Neville Marriner has been a tireless ambassador for British orchestral music around the world, principally through his devotion to The Academy of St Martin in the Fields, which this year celebrates its 50th anniversary. And we also honour the commitment and dedication of Vernon "Tod" Handley, who worked with so many of our members over so many years and who was such an ardent champion of British composers. His death in September came as a sad moment for us all, and it brings us some comfort that we are able to pay tribute to him today by presenting his widow with a special ABO Award.”

Speaking about the ABO Award, Sir Neville Marriner said: “The Academy and I are sincerely grateful for the recognition you have offered us for our 50 years together – a most unusually happy partnership.”

The awards will be presented by Timothy Walker to Sir Neville and the widow of the late Vernon Handley at the National Museum Wales in Cardiff.

The ABO Award is presented annually to an individual or institution considered by members to have made an exceptional contribution to Britain's orchestral life. The Award is unique in the world of music because its recipient is nominated by members of the Association of British Orchestras themselves.

ends

Notes for editors

BIOGRAPHIES

Sir Neville Marriner CBE

Like his mentor and hero, Pierre Monteux, Sir Neville Marriner began life as a violinist, playing first in a string quartet and trio, then in the London Symphony Orchestra, during which period he founded the Academy of St Martin in the Fields.

After his studies in America with Maestro Monteux, he began his conducting career in 1969, when he founded the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, at the same time developing and extending the size and repertoire of the Academy, and guest conducting orchestras all over the world.

In 1979 he became Music Director and Principal Conductor of both the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra and the Sudwest Deutsche Radio Orchestra in Stuttgart, positions he held until the late into the 1980s.

Subsequently he has continued to work with orchestras round the globe – Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Milan, Athens, New York, Boston, San Francisco and Tokyo. His recording career is well documented and his touring schedule extensive.

He made his opera debut conducting *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Aix-en-Provence Festival, his US debut in Los Angeles with *La Cenerentola*, then a Salzburg Mozarteum production of *Il Re Pastore*. He opened the new opera house in Athens in 2005 with a production of *The Magic Flute*.

Twice honoured for his services to music in his own country, he has recently been awarded honours in France, Germany and Sweden.

Vernon George Handley CBE (11 November 1930 – 10 September 2008)

For 45 years Vernon Handley's career was unique amongst front rank conductors in that he unashamedly championed British repertoire before that of all other countries. Recognised as Sir Adrian Boult's protégé he held steadfastly to two principles: the undemonstrative technique and the unfashionable repertoire.

Vernon Handley probably recorded, performed and broadcast more British music than any other conductor living or dead. In some 160 discs, over 90 are British, including 87 works which have not been recorded before. He gave over 100 premieres. In his recorded output are all the symphonies of Bax, Vaughan Williams, Stanford, Malcolm Arnold and Robert Simpson, all the major works of Elgar and the whole of Moeran's orchestral music.

He was outright winner three times of the Gramophone Record of the Year, as well as runner up twice and nominated 8 times. At the Gramophone Awards of 2003 he was awarded a Special Award for services to British Music. He has won the BPI Classical award twice and his recording of Walton's First Symphony was declared "Collectors Choice" in Classic CD. He won a Grand Prix du Disque for a recording of French repertoire with the Philharmonia Orchestra. His complete cycle of symphonies by Sir Arnold Bax for Chandos Records was chosen as one of his 100 Greatest Recordings by Gramophone's outgoing Editor, James Jolly, in December 2005. In May 2007 Vernon Handley was the recipient of only the second Lifetime Achievement Award to be given by the Classical Brits.

In 1983 the London Philharmonic made Vernon Handley their Associate Conductor in recognition of his long relationship with the orchestra. He was Chief Guest Conductor of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Chief Conductor of the Malmö Symphony Orchestra, Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Ulster Orchestra, Chief Guest Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Chief Guest Conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Chief Conductor of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra and Chief Guest Conductor of the BBC Concert Orchestra.

During this time Vernon Handley was Professor of Conducting at the Royal College of Music and was created F.R.C.M. He was also regularly conducting the National Youth Orchestra and the World Youth Orchestra and is widely known for his encouragement of young professional players.

Vernon Handley was appointed Musical Director to the Borough of Guildford in 1962, staying for 21 years to establish a new professional orchestra, the Guildford Philharmonic. During his tenure the Guildford Concerts Scheme was one of the most successful in the country, playing an extraordinarily wide repertoire and making several first-ever recordings of unfamiliar British works. In recognition of his great contribution to music in the South East, the University of Surrey awarded him a Doctorate.

Vernon Handley was Principal Conductor of the English Symphony Orchestra, Conductor Emeritus of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Conductor Laureate of the Ulster Orchestra and Associate Conductor of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. He was created Honorary Fellow of the Royal Philharmonic Society in 1990 and was elected an Honorary Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford in 1999. Vernon Handley was appointed Commander of the British Empire in the Queen's Birthday Honours, June 2004.

ABO AWARD PREVIOUS WINNERS

1991 Sir Peter Maxwell Davies	2001 Sir Charles Mackerras
1992 Sir Simon Rattle	2002 Libby MacNamara †
1993 Sir John Drummond	2002 John Wallace OBE
1994 Classic FM	2003 Bernard Haitink KBE
1995 William Relton	2004 Oliver Knussen
1996 Sir Michael Tippett	2005 Roger Wright
1997 BBC Radio 3	2006 David Richardson
1998 Richard Hickox CBE	2007 Sir Nicholas Kenyon
1999 Gillian Moore MBE	† Special Award
2000 Edward Smith	

For press enquiries please contact:

Mark Pemberton
mark@abo.org.uk
020 7287 0333

or

Kate Whyman
kate@katewhymanpr.co.uk
01273 648374/07766 686259