

A Tribute to Dr Kenneth Bowen

Elizabeth Siberry, Former Chair of the London Welsh Chorale,
at the Kenneth Bowen Memorial Concert on Saturday, 6 July 2019

Born in Llanelli in 1932, Ken attended Llanelli Grammar School and then read music at Aberystwyth University. Moving on to St. John's College, Cambridge where he was a Choral Scholar, he honed his musical skills and was soon in great demand as a tenor soloist. Over the course of his career, he performed at Covent Garden, Glyndebourne, the Proms and many other Opera houses and concert halls throughout the world. And he sang under the baton of many great conductors such as Adrian Boult, Malcolm Sargent and Colin Davis. The work with which he is probably most associated, however, is Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* and he gave over 200 performances of this wonderful work.

He was also a pioneer of Welsh Music, old and new, giving first performances of works by his great friends William Mathias, Alun Hoddinott, Grace Williams and Dilys Elwyn Edwards and many of us still feel a tingle down our backs as we listen to the CD of his recordings of Welsh songs *Mae Hiraeth yn y Môr*, which was issued in 2008. Ken's wonderful rendition of *Elen Fwyn* was also included in the CD *Great Welsh Tenor Solos*. He performed at major events in Wales such as the Prince of Wales's Investiture in Caernarfon in 1969 and the opening of St. David's Hall, in Cardiff in 1983. Many young singers from Wales and elsewhere have cause to be grateful to Ken for his skills and support as Head of Vocal Studies at the Royal Academy of Music in London.

In our own London Welsh community, Ken for many years gave freely of his time, as founding conductor of the London Welsh Chorale and as an active member of the London Welsh Centre. He was also a regular judge at Eisteddfodau. Current and former members of the Chorale have many happy memories of Ken during the 25 years in which he was our much loved and admired conductor. Under his baton, the Chorale sang many of the great choral works, as well as newly commissioned works by Welsh composers. Ken regularly accompanied the choir on tour and we have lasting memories of him, for example, singing *Nessun dorma* in a Tuscan hilltop village. With a quizzical look and raised eyebrow, he would also join in post-concert festivities in some local hostelry. His last concert as conductor in 2008 was the *Messiah* with four of his former pupils as soloists.

Although he spent most of his adult life in England, Wales, its language, culture, art and music was central to Ken's life and he was a major figure in the London Welsh community. His musical contribution to Wales was marked by the award of an honorary Doctorate of Music by the University of Wales in 2003.

Elizabeth Siberry