

## Albert William Ketelbey Born Aug 9th, 1875, died Nov 26th, 1959.

(Written by his sister Caroline 1896-1990)

He early showed marked musical talent, and receiving every encouragement from his father turned into something of a musical prodigy. He sang as a boy in the choir of St Giles's Church, Lozells, and was plunged by his father into the lively musical life that was beginning to blossom in Birmingham and its neighbourhood. He studied musical form and composition with private teachers and is said to have had a sonata shown to and approved by Elgar. He was kept by his father, not without some resistance, to a rigorous time-table of practising. At the age of twelve he won a scholarship to Trinity College of Music in London, the runner up being Gustav Holst. It was part of the programme that he should go as a boarder to Fitzroy College, Fitzroy Square. The Headmaster of the day, being lame, carried a stick with which he was said to beat unruly boys<sup>(1)</sup>. Within the first term, A.W.K. ran away and, the story goes, borrowing money from the cook, returned to his father's house. He was of course taken back to London but put to approved lodgings with a musical family, to one of whom, Miss Florence Hoare, he afterwards dedicated several of his songs.

He embarked on a wide-ranging programme of musical activities as later opportunity offered. At the age of 16 he was organist at St John's Wimbledon, at 22, Director of a West End Theatre Orchestra. Later he became musical Editor of the Columbia Gramophone Co and from editing compositions<sup>(2)</sup> turned to producing his own, ranging wide during the course of a very active life. An opera in the Gilbert and Sullivan style, entitled the Wonder Worker, was followed by a number of Songs and Lyrics, experiments in the Twelve-Tone scale and the popular exercises in the romantic descriptive genre- In a Monastery Garden, In a Persian Market, In a Chinese Temple, A Gypsy Overture, Chal Romano and many others by violin solos (The Phantom melody was dedicated to and said to be written for his brother Harold), The list cannot be particularised but the point can be made by the story of an enthusiastic admirer who rushed at him with the words " Oh, Mr Ketelbey, I know all your six pieces" "six" came the riposte, "more like six hundred". ( In a different key, it may perhaps be mentioned that 'In a Monastery Garden' was much liked by King George V who had it played on the Terrace at Windsor during his evening meal..He summoned A.W.K. to him with a view to offering him a knighthood but died before the matter was completed)

A.W.K. married twice. His first wife was Charlotte Curzon who was herself associated with musical and stage circles and had some what dramatic propensities. It is believed, in fact stated, to have had its influence in leading her nephew, now Sir Clifford Curzon<sup>(3)</sup>, to his own distinguished musical career. On her death in 1946, he married two or three years later, Maud May Pritchard, a Widow, nee Hebdige from the Isle of Wight. Under her influence he settled in the island, his professional career having outlasted two World Wars, being virtually terminated. His name however is not forgotten and his works continue to be sold, any profits having been assigned by his will to the Musicians Benevolent Fund. He died in the Isle of Wight in 1959, his widow, rather suddenly of a cerebral haemorrhage, on Oct 18th 1980. There were no children by either marriage.

1). There were inevitable references to Dotheboys Hall by the Dickensians

2) A.W.K. became involved in a lawsuit for breach of copyright in his editing of "The Beggars Opera".

3) Died Sept 1<sup>st</sup> 1982, aged 75 years.