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Albert Ketèlbey

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<http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/ketelbey>

Albert William Ketèlbey was born in Alma Street, Aston on 9th August, 1875, the son of a teacher at the Vittoria School of Art.

In his youth he was head chorister at St Silas's Church, Lozells, and at the age of 11 he composed a **Sonata for Pianoforte** which he played not long afterwards to an admiring Edward Elgar. In 1998, the manuscript for this work came up for auction at Sotheby's. It was purchased by the City and is now in the Archives of the Central Library.

He studied at the Midland Institute School of Music, where a blue plaque (picture above) on the side of the building, in Cornwall Street, commemorates his life. It reads (all in upper case):

"Birmingham Civic Society 2002
"Albert Ketèlbey
"Composer and Musician
"1875-1959
"A student at the Birmingham School of Music, at that time attached to this institute"



After a further spell as a student at Fitzroy College, London, Ketèlbey attended the Trinity College of Music, where he beat the runner-up, Gustav Holst, for a musical scholarship. He distinguished himself in numerous fields, especially in composition. His first works were in the classical style and a Quintet for Strings was awarded the Sir Michael Costa prize.

However, he developed a talent for descriptive writing and, of all his many works, it is those of this genre, **In a Monastery Garden**, **In a Chinese Temple Garden**, and **In a Persian Market** that show his ability to catch atmospheric tone.

Once, whilst conducting a programme of his own music at a Royal Command Performance, Ketèlbey gave a second rendering of the State Procession Movement of his **Cockney Suite** during the interval, at the request of King George V, who had arrived too late to hear it performed at the beginning of the programme.

He was active in several other fields including being music editor to some well-known publishing houses and for some years Musical Director of the Columbia Gramophone Company.

He was a popular conductor and was well esteemed in the theatre world where he conducted for Andre Charlot at the Vaudeville Theatre, London. He also conducted many concerts of his own works in London and the Provinces and, as guest conductor with well-known orchestras on the continent, including the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. His reputation on the continent was probably higher than in his own country. In fact, a Viennese music critic once said of Ketèlbey's music that it came second only to that of Johann Strauss and Franz Lehar.

Albert died on 26th November, 1959 at his home, Egypt Hill, Cowes, Isle of Wight, aged 84.