



The Thiman Brothers – Cedric, Kenneth and Eric
(see below)

The Eric Thiman Collection

Newsletter No 12

This is the twelfth Newsletter detailing the progress of the Eric Thiman Collection. If you know anyone else who would like to be included in emailing/ mailing list, please send their details to Guy Turner (contact details at the end of the newsletter). Thank you.

THE ERIC THIMAN COLLECTION

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RE: THE LATEST CD

The CD of Thiman and Michael Head songs performed by Emily Gray and Nicole Johnson, and launched in the last Newsletter, has been very well received.

It has been played on both Classic FM and Radio 3, where Petroc Trelawney described it as a 'Emily's wonderful disc. It is a fabulous recording and Emily is a very fine artist. It is so good that Thiman's and Head's songs now have the recording they deserve.'

On Music Web International, Jonathan Woolf warmly reviewed the disc: 'I can happily urge you to hear this most sympathetic recording' praising Thiman as a 'subtle communicator'.

The CD was launched in Hampstead in November and then in Southwell in February, in both cases before appreciative audiences. At the Hampstead launch, Dorothy Webster Thomas, who sponsored the recording, have the following address, which is worth quoting in full:

Tonight is such a special and exciting celebration of this wonderful project.

In 2017 I heard Emily and Nicole perform a recital of English song, and I knew these performers were the artists that would be perfect to record the works of the composers that gave me my life in music, Eric Thiman and Michael Head.

Eric Thiman and Michael Head heard me sing at the Whitehaven Festival in 1952. Both were professors at the Royal Academy of Music. Both encouraged me in my hope to study there. In my last year Michael gave me the manuscript of a song which was the first of the Three Latin Hymns. We recorded it in a high key to persuade Boosey and Hawks to publish it in high and low keys. Much later he sent me a tape, and a letter. He said he had lost the tape for a while, but also wanted my permission to dedicate the second song to me. I have now had the tape transferred to CD. It is a special treasure.

Michael loved to travel. The AB sent him as an examiner all over the world. He also gave lectures and masterclasses and broadcast his songs. In his travels, the Grand Canyon impressed him more than anything else. When he was seventy-five he rode a mule to the bottom of the canyon without mishap. The mule decided not to take him back to the top. He was rescued by helicopter. He loved every minute of his adventure.

In 1976 the board sent him again to South Africa. The base was a large impersonal hotel. The other two examiners were sent to a different town for two day's work. On their return they found that Michael had died of a burst appendix. That this dead man died alone and in agony doubled my grief. The board has made sure that this can never happen again .

For twenty-nine and a half years, Eric Thiman was organist at a church in Crouch End. On Easter Day in 1957 he became the organist to the large congregation of the City Temple. Eric said to me 'You have to come and help me with the choir.' His beloved wife Madeline joined the altos. There were 30 amateur singers led by a professional quartet. Eight months later the lovely soprano went to live in Canada and gave me her job.

The City Temple, on Holborn Viaduct was severely damaged in the blitz. The people were bombed out of eight other churches. By 1957 they were all sharing a large building near Marble Arch. The minister, Dr Lesley Weatherhead, was a famous orator and writer of many books. He went on a tour of America to earn the money for the rebuild. In New York he stayed with Mr and Mrs Rockefeller. They gave him a personal gift of \$50,000. The rebuilt church was opened by the Queen Mother in October 1958.

Eric designed the organ. This instrument gave him joy and inspiration for the rest of his life. For us he wrote introits and anthems. His playing of the hymns inspired people to sing the meaning of the words. The last verse was always in unison so he could change the harmony. The service finished with an improvisation on the last hymn tune. Glorious music never to be repeated.

Eric and Madeline often invited me to their home, I was always included in special occasions such as birthday parties. After delicious food, Eric would play his favourite record, Florence Foster Jenkins singing the Queen of the Night.

They loved to go on holiday to Switzerland. I have a collection of postcards from little villages off the beaten track.

Eric had to earn his living as a composer. He worked with amateur musicians and understood their needs – singable melodies, with beautifully written piano parts and interesting harmonies, but with difficulties to strengthen their abilities.

He was respected by his colleagues. He was completely self-taught – at 27, the youngest ever doctorate of music at that time. He was a professor at the RAM at 31. He became FRSM, FRCO and Dean of the Faculty of Music at London University.

After being Eric's soprano for seven wonderful years, I resigned, expecting my first child. On Christmas Day 1974 Eric played the service and then he and Madeline came to us for lunch. Madeline was astounded when Eric asked for a second helping of pudding. It was a happy time.

Six weeks later, on February 13th, 1975, Eric died of prostate cancer.

I would acknowledge here the work of Guy Turner, who sang in Eric's Choir (The Elysian Singers) in Crouch End and has put together the Thiman Collection at the Archbishop's Palace in Southwell. The Palace is a separate building from the Minster, which has recently been refurbished. An unused space holds the impressive collection of over 1300 published compositions and a display of memorabilia of Eric's life.

Recently, a miracle, an unknown piano sonata of one movement, written when Eric was 22 has been found. This is not music for amateur. The piano part of very difficult, and the musical ideas powerfully expressed. You can see this on Youtube performed by a young American pianist.

Nicole, I have a copy of this sonata for you, as a Thank You for your beautiful playing on the recording.

Emily, you know I have two songs in Eric's handwriting, 'Fain would I change that note', and his 21st birthday present to me 'Song of Farewell'. These will be yours. Emily, the words 'Thank You' are not enough.

You not only sing with your heart and soul on the recording, but you alone have understood what needed to be done to bring it to the world. You alone have tonight achieved this. I want everyone here to buy as many of the CDs as possible. Its purpose has always been to enhance the careers of these sublimely gifted musicians.

PURCHASE CDs

A reminder that the CD is available from the Collection for 10 plus £1.50 post and packing, as are the recording of Thiman's Choral Music, and the recording of Thiman playing his own music on the City Temple Organ. Ordering details below.

A SPECIAL ADDITION TO THE ARCHIVE

Frances Thimann has kindly provided the following note about Eric and his brothers:

(A reminder that Eric dropped the second 'n' from his name in the wake of the first world war – the rest of the family retained it)

Eric was the second of four brothers; though the eldest, Ralph, died in the First World War, aged only 20. All four boys attended Caterham School (see below), in Surrey, then an establishment for the sons of Congregational Ministers. It is well-known that musical talent often runs in families (the Kanneh-Mason family a notable example here in Nottingham!) - and Eric was certainly not the only one of his family to show musical interest and abilities.

Kenneth, a few years younger than Eric, became a hugely distinguished scientist and academic, emigrating to USA during the 1930s, but he considered a musical career, only following a different path perhaps because Eric had already chosen the musical one. Kenneth was a life-long lover of music, a pianist, and the composer of a number of pieces which have recently been donated to the EHT Archive. There was always music in his home – his wife, Ann, also studied music, and their daughters all played various instruments. The middle daughter, Karen, became a cellist of professional standard, and it is she who has been in touch with the Archive recently and sent us these materials – thank you so much, Karen.

Kenneth also encouraged musical activities in his academic departments and amongst his colleagues there.

The Music now in the collection : There are some children's songs, and a beautiful solo song entitled 'The Nightingale Near the House' possibly written for Kenneth's wife, Ann. And there are several instrumental works, including a fine piece for cello and piano, which might receive a performance in Southwell in the autumn! Some of these pieces are definitely influenced by Eric's style, others are more complex harmonically, with a similarity to the music of Peter Warlock.

My own father, Cedric (IC Thimann), the youngest of the brothers, specialised in modern languages, and became a teacher and lecturer, author of a number of books on this topic. But as a boy he learned the violin and piano and, though he did not become a musician, was a great lover of music (Mozart and Haydn especially). He and my mother met in the local church choir, or so I have been told... He could at any time sit at the piano and play a harmonised hymn-tune, for example (something that I cannot do.)

I studied music too, though I did not become a professional musician; and one of my great-nephews is also a talented pianist, with perfect pitch and the ability to play by ear. And it is Eric's own piano that he plays!

Coda: A book is available on Amazon entitled 'Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden', by one IC Thimann. So maybe my father had a hidden life, only now being revealed?

MORE ABOUT KENNETH

As indicated above, Karen Romer, daughter of Eric's brother Kenneth, has recently supplied copies of some of Kenneth's compositions for the collection. She was kind enough to provide the following information and reminiscences.

I realized recently that Kenneth - Eric's younger brother who greatly admired Eric and I think vice versa, had composed some quite lovely pieces. It occurred to me that perhaps you would be interested in having them in the Archive. Kenneth had thought of having a musical career as a young man, but had decided on science finally. He and my mother were devoted to music, and actively sustained it in our home by tirelessly accompanying us while we sang all the Gilbert and Sullivan songs around the piano at night, quietly helped us prepare solo pieces for recitals on the various instruments we played, wrote charming songs for us when we were little, and invited colleagues who played instruments well to come over in the evening and play chamber music, at a very high level. (I first heard the Brahms two late clarinet sonatas that way, as the two colleagues worked on them over my last two years at home, and of course I have never forgotten them!)

A manuscript in pencil that we discovered entitled Alstead Variations, has an interesting detail in connection with Eric. Alstead is a beloved place in rural N.H. where our parents found a neglected very old farmhouse in 1938. Of course, the war intervened, so it was not until the late 40s that they could begin to fix it up. Nonetheless, my mother took us all, and some additional English children up there every summer. She did most of the "roughing" it - vegetable garden, canning, cooking on a wood stove, and mouths to feed, ages 2-14, groceries delivered once a week as gas was rationed etc. It was paradise for all the kids, who roamed the countryside freely; we all grew deeply attached to it. When Eric came to visit briefly, on a tour, I think, in c. 1955, we took him up there. I remember him well, smiling broadly and typically winningly, down by our swimming place on a near-by lake.

I have found a journal I kept when I spent a year in Europe, in 1955, after I had just completed high school. (I had met Eric in person once before, in 1950, our first visit after the war.)

"Eric is the same as always. Gwen [his sister in law married to Cedric, the youngest Thimann brother] says he is ageless, and he looks it. He never seems to change. Very neat and trim.

Well-kept hands, strong. A way of looking over, a little slyly, to see if witty remarks are understood and approved, with slow emphasis on certain phrases not necessarily meant to be funny, but which always amuse me. Madeline is still as gushy as ever, but with a sweet disposition....

"We had a lovely evening with E and M. We played a word game, two rounds, both of which Eric, to his apparent nonchalance, but obviously definite satisfaction, won. He was startled that I nearly beat him the first time (and I would have, except for his 10 bonus points for going out). I fancy he quite likes the Thimann girls - I mean not counting Vivi [our older sister], who has always been his favourite. Linda made quite an impression!"

Kenneth was a high powered and respected scientist as can be seen in this Biographical Memoir published by the US National Academy of Sciences:
<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ui=2&ik=a515448aaf&attid=0.1.1&permmmsgid=msg-f:1748763448651039656&th=1844db17590843a8&view=att&disp=inline>

FROM CATERHAM SCHOOL

As noted above, the Thiman brothers attended Caterham School, and here is a note from the school about the activities of the Eric Thiman Singers:

The Eric Thiman Singers (ETS) is an auditioned chapel choir set up in 2010 as a tribute to Old Caterhamian Eric Thiman. They have toured in Europe to Paris, Brussels, Prague and Cologne and they have performed at some impressive venues. The choir played a major role in the School's bicentenary celebrations and sang as part of the service at Westminster Abbey and at a celebration concert at St John's Smiths Square. They also sang for the Duke of Kent when he visited the School. The choir is made up of singers from both the Prep and First to Third Year pupils in the Senior school. ETS performs annually at the St. Christopher's Music Festival in Epsom and regularly appear in the Caterham community. Alongside the Chamber Choir, ETS performed at St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican in Rome - a highlight of their impressive achievements.

Last year, on the back of the success of ETS, the school launched JETS - Junior ETS - which has gone down extremely well. This choir is based at the prep school and is for pupils in Years 3-5. It is now the training choir for ETS. The younger children love the name JETS and it has become quite the 'cool' choir to be in which is nice. So the legacy has expanded and the younger children are told about the significance of the name.



The bronze relief of Thiman (made by Linda Thimann Dewing, niece of the composer) hangs in pride of place outside the Caterham School Music Department

PAYMENTS

For payment of donations or for CDs:

Either by bank transfer to Southwell Minster Choirs Association
60-20-15 68034652
Reference: Thiman Collection (and either 'donation', or 'CD')

Or post a cheque made out to 'Southwell Minster Choir Association', with 'Eric Thiman Collection' written on the back, to Guy Turner.

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<https://www.southwellminster.org/eric-thiman-collection/>