GERALD ABRAHAM *BBC*

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

Gerald Ernest Heal Abraham 1904–1988

GERALD ABRAHAM, the distinguished historian of music, was born on 9 March 1904 in Newport on the Isle of Wight. He was the only child of Ernest Abraham (1870–1942) and his wife Dorothy Mary, *née* Heal (1873–1938). The father is described in *DNB* rather grandly as a 'manufacturer', but he was in fact a butcher, looking after the bacon in a shop in Newport staffed by himself and his brothers and owned by one of them. The mother was the only daughter of another Newport shopowner, the jeweller and watchmaker James Henry Heal, whose ancestors, in direct line, had been blacksmiths at Calbourne since 'at least the mid-eighteenth century'.[1] Abraham's daughter Frances thinks that he may have abandoned the family trade because of near-sightedness—a quality certainly better adapted to the solitude of the bench than to the community of the anvil—and that it was from him, perhaps, that Gerald Abraham inherited the myopia which he in turn passed on to her. Watch-making, however, may already have been in James Heal's family, for his mother, born Mary Arnold, was possibly related to John and John Roger Arnold, the well-known makers of chronometers and watches of the late

[1] This and later, unreferenced, quotations are from correspondence with Abraham's daughter, Frances Abraham, in which she generously set down her own and her mother's memories and answered innumerable questions. It is often thanks to her that I am enabled to correct and amplify existing accounts of her father in the *Dictionary of National Biography 1986–1990*, ed. C. S. Nicholls (1996), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie (20 vols., 1980; 2nd edn. 29 vols., 2001), *The Annual Obituary 1988* (London & Chicago, 1990, pp. 121–3) and other sources to be named later.

Proceedings of the British Academy, **111**, 339–93. © The British Academy 2001.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who are mentioned in Dava Sobel's *Longitude*[2]—though Abraham would not have known that. Fanciful readers may wish to trace a dual inheritance here: from the father's side, Abraham's realistic grasp of the vital, solid, every-day necessities in musical history; from the mother's, his delight in examining the intricate mechanisms of musical creation, and also of its context in a finely-poised balance of interrelationships with other cultural, social, and historical forces. It might be more germane to note that he came from a background of hard work and little or modest money. Anyone reading that his father was a 'manufacturer', and that in 1924 the young Gerald spent a year abroad in Cologne in order to learn German and listen to fine music, might easily have concluded, as I did at first, that his early years had been rather privileged, and that his wide experience of music, languages, and literature was the fruit of elegant and leisurely dilettantism. That was not the case. Whatever income he lived on, however he bought time and materials for his studies and early career, 'it was all from his pen'.

His schooling was ordinary, even sketchy. It is occasionally suggested that he attended The Portsmouth Grammar School, but that does not square with his description of himself towards the end of his life as 'totally uneducated', and indeed he did not: I suspect that someone may have heard him refer to his period of study with a 'Portsmouth crammer' (see below) and misinterpreted the phrase as 'Portsmouth Grammar'. His application for a post at the BBC in 1935[3] admits only to 'a local preparatory school'. The CV that he submitted in 1946 when he was a candidate for the Chair of Music at Liverpool University[4] identifies the school as Portland House, Newport, Isle of Wight. Its proper title was Portland House Academy, a boys' school whose principal, Mr E. G. Barnes, advertised 'a thoroughly sound education for a Commercial, Professional, or Engineering Career. Individual attention. Preparation for Public Schools, Civil Service, and learned Professions, &c.'[5] Abraham attended from the age of ten and left at fifteen, returning briefly later on to teach the junior boys (he sketched

[2] See D. Sobel and W. J. H. Andrewes, *The Illustrated Longitude* (1998), pp. 170, 185–93, 202. Mary Arnold owned an Arnold watch, still in the family's possession. Mrs Pat Abraham reports that her husband 'liked some of the cousins on his mother's side'; but he seems not to have kept in touch with those on his father's side, with whom 'he had nothing in common'.

[3] Mrs Jacqueline Kavanagh, the BBC's Written Archivist, kindly verified all details of Abraham's BBC career from his staff file, and her colleague Sue Knowles gave further help.

[4] The Archivist of Liverpool University, Mr Adrian Allan, provided generous material relating to Abraham's tenure of the chair, as also did Professors Michael Talbot and Basil Smallman.

[5] Mr Richard Smout, Isle of Wight County Archivist, kindly sent me information about the school (which closed in 1936, leaving no archive) and about the Abraham and Heal families.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

some drawings of them which still survive). Portland House Academy was a cut above a council school, but was not the kind of institution to recognise Abraham's academic potential and steer him towards a scholarship and higher education. Amongst other subjects, it may have taught him a little French and dog-Latin, but his later virtuosity in modern foreign languages did not repose on any deep grounding in classical studies.[6]

Growing up within sight, sound, and scent of the sea, and in wartime, with Southampton and the great naval base of Portsmouth just across the Solent, he had conceived a boyish admiration for Nelson, and his first choice of career was the Royal Navy. Although he was interested in naval history and probably by then knew something of naval warfare, tactics, and gunnery, he was probably right in thinking that this was less likely to commend him to the Admiralty than his head for figures and accountancy. So he enrolled for two years (*c.*1919–21) at a naval crammer's in Portsmouth, Lewin Oliver of Mile End House, intending to sit the examinations for the rank of Paymaster Cadet—not perhaps a normal route to a command, but, once enlisted, he might have transferred to some more heroic sphere. No doubt he would have performed well, but his poor eyesight let him down and he failed to pass the physical.[7] He must have been bitterly disappointed. Associated with that rejection was an adolescent breakdown in health. It seems possible that these upsets induced an existential crisis of identity, that *horror vacui* which sometimes impels those who become outstanding scholars to seek firmer ground in the apparent certainties of the world of learning. It may surprise those who remember his unvarying affability and good humour to discover that he was a prey throughout his life, as great achievers often are, to frequent spells of depression. One person outside the family who witnessed that is Philip Barford, a friend, colleague, and protégé of his Liverpool years, who on the morning of Abraham's fiftieth birthday entered his room at the university to congratulate him; 'he was sitting morose and gloomy at his desk

[6] He wrote in an editorial that the death of Schoenberg 'has removed from the musical scene its most semeniferous mind' (*Monthly Musical Record*, 81 (1951), 169); and, commenting on the first line of Striggio's libretto for Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, where La Musica says that she has come 'Dal mio permesso amato', 'from my beloved Permessus' (a river dear to the Muses), instead of looking it up in a classical dictionary he suggested that it was a misprint for 'Parnasso' (ibid. 80 (1950), 58).

[7] The family say that it was Abraham's poor eyesight that kept him out of the Navy, but his BBC application of 1935 does not mention it: 'Owing to service cuts at this period (1921–2) he was advised to abandon a career in the RN'. He joked about the matter to Roland John Wiley in 1983: 'Like Rimsky-Korsakov I was a failed sailor; I failed even quicker than Rimsky.' ('A Recollection of 20 June 1983', in *Slavonic and Western Music: Essays for Gerald Abraham*, ed. M. H. Brown and R. J. Wiley, Russian Music Studies, No. 12 (Ann Arbor, 1985), pp. 1–3.)

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

by the window, and I noticed that, amazingly, the cover was still on his typewriter. He told me that he felt that he had achieved nothing so far, and his life was more than half over.'[8] Presumably he meant his working life; yet during the years 1922–54 he had published seventeen books, edited eight more and translated two, produced at least a hundred articles and papers, launched *The History of Music in Sound*, and played a leading role in planning *The New Oxford History of Music*. And this was a fit of truly profound despair, which put Barford in mind of Beethoven's 'Heiligenstadt Testament'.

We must go back to 1921–2. During his convalescence he turned to his other boyhood love, music. He had taken piano lessons with local teachers since the age of fourteen and continued them until he was nineteen (1923).[9] Although he never became a professionally competent pianist, he could play well enough on a good day to illustrate his lectures at the keyboard.[10] His martial ambitions, however, were to be sublimated in another form: he became more and more deeply interested in naval and military history. He told Malcolm Hamrick Brown[11] around 1984 that his first foray into scholarship was when, aged about ten, 'he began (but soon abandoned) a history of the Boer War with sketch-maps!'. Brown continues:

> On the eve of the 1918 Armistice, young Abraham, then fourteen, was reading about Lee's surrender at Appomattox, and eight years later, his first visit to France took him to Alsace and Lorraine to explore the 1870 battlefields. (His diary records that he spent 6 August 1926 rambling over the field of Gravelotte.) A few years later, he would complete an account (still unpublished) of the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885, and as recently as the early 1960s, he

[8] Mr Barford kindly produced an eleven-page memoir of Abraham for me, itself worthy of publication. The typewriter mentioned was a Remington portable, bought in the early 1920s, on which—doubtless much repaired—he is said to have typed his entire output.

[9] One of his piano teachers was headmistress of a school in Newport and a cousin of his future wife, who was a pupil there. His first sight of Pat was at this time: she was 'in tears when she had been kept in after school because she couldn't do her sums'.

[10] The committee appointing him to the Liverpool chair reported that he was not 'a virtuoso performer, though he is sufficient of a pianist to illustrate his own lectures'. I never heard him play, but Hugh Macdonald did, evidently on an off day: 'I recall him illustrating a lecture on Brahms's variations by going to the piano to play the first B♭ chord of the St. Anthony Variations. Despite long preparation the chord, when finally struck, was wrong.' ('Recollections: Gerald Abraham (1904–1988)', *19th Century Music*, 12 (1988–9), 188–9.)

[11] 'Introduction', *Slavonic and Western Music* (1985), pp. ix–xi, at ix, reprinted by permission of the publisher, EMI Research Press, Ann Arbor (much of this is repeated, with updating, in Brown's obituary 'Gerald Ernest Heal Abraham (1904–1988)' in the *AMS Newsletter* (American Musicological Society, Feb. 1989), p. 9). The idea of a myopic sharp-shooter may seem unlikely, but corrective lenses work wonders, and Abraham possessed a cardboard target with five bull's-eyes as proof of his ability.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

> began gathering materials for what was to have been his *opus ultimum*, a book on the last of the Russo-Turkish Wars. But except for becoming a respectable rifle-shot and serving in the BBC Home Guard during World War II, Abraham's militarism has remained all 'in the head'.

No notes, sketches or completed work in this category survive today. Hugh Macdonald tells how at the International Musicological Society's congress in Copenhagen in 1972 Abraham 'led a guided tour round the fortifications of Elsinore, explaining the procedures and problems of medieval artillery'.[12] Winton Dean, himself interested in military history, recalls lively discussions with Abraham on the subject, and his musicological writings often reveal an exceptional grasp of political history and geography which must have been informed by his military and naval studies.

Rejected by the Navy, Abraham seems by 1923 to have used his musical talents to make a vicarious connection with the Army. That he actually thought of enlisting seems unlikely, but he told M. H. Brown, looking back from the age of eighty, that at this time 'he began scoring arrangements and, on occasion, composing original music for the band of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders at the local garrison'. The local garrison on the Isle of Wight was stationed at Albany Barracks in Parkhurst, and Mrs Abraham can remember her husband talking about the bandmaster there, though she could not recall his name. Now the bandmaster of the 2nd Battalion, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders from 1908 to 1928 was none other than F. J. Ricketts, better known under the pseudonym 'Kenneth J. Alford'. Did Abraham work with or for the English Souza, the composer of *Colonel Bogey*, whose music was to accompany the building of the Bridge on the River Kwai? Surely, if that had been the case, he would have said so. Further research has shown that Ricketts and his band were not stationed in the Isle of Wight at this time, though they may have given occasional concerts there. In the 1946 CV mentioned above, which dates from some thirty-five years earlier, Abraham described his musical training thus: '1916–21 Musical education from local teachers. 1923 Practical study of orchestration with the Military Bands of the Royal Ulster Rifles and of the Royal Marines.' There is no mention of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and the word 'study' is used, which suggests a relationship with a teacher. The Royal Marines had a nearby school of music, but it was in Portsmouth on the mainland, not at Parkhurst. Ricketts was to move on in later life to conduct two of the Royal Marines' bands, based respectively in Deal

[12] 'Recollections', *19th Century Music*, 12.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

(1928–30) and Plymouth (1930–44)—in the wrong places, and too late for our present purposes.

We come nearer to home with 'the Royal Ulster Rifles'. As the Royal Irish Rifles, they were indeed stationed at Parkhurst Barracks from April 1920 until August 1923, when they were posted to the Rhine (in 1921, however, they had become the 1st Battalion, Royal Ulster Rifles). Identification of this band enables us to solve a further mystery in Abraham's biography. His very first book, *Borodin* (1927)[13] is dedicated 'To W. A., in affectionate gratitude for many lessons', and no-one has been able to tell me who 'W. A.' might have been, although he was clearly of considerable importance to Abraham. *The History of British Military Bands*,[14] by Major Gordon Turner, CBE, informs us that the bandmaster of the Royal Irish or Ulster Rifles, from 1916 to his retirement in 1930, was one William Allen, LRAM, ARCM (1880–1952). No other bandmaster of the right period and place has been found with the initials 'W. A.',[15] which do not seem to have belonged to any of Abraham's piano-teachers either. We are forced to conclude that William Allen, whose two diplomas distinguish him as an unusually well-qualified bandmaster, was the man to whom Abraham turned for his early musical instruction: his academy, like Arthur Sullivan's, was a bandroom. He presumably started taking lessons in musical technique from Allen in 1921, soon after his rejection from the Navy, for it would surely have taken a couple of years of preliminary study of the basic vocabulary of music to bring him to the point where he could arrange or compose music for a military band. (Writing for military or brass band is a highly specialised craft: even so skilled an orchestrator as Edward Elgar was happy to improve the instrumentation of his *Severn Suite* after seeking more expert advice.) Once Abraham had decided on a career in music, then, he sought out the best professional music-teacher available to him in the Isle of Wight, and studied to good effect.

Existing accounts of Abraham all stress that he was an autodidact, and in languages, literature, criticism, history, and the higher learning he

[13] *Borodin: The Composer and his Music* (1927, rev. edn. 1935).

[14] 3 vols., Staplehurst, 1994, 1996, 1997, vol. 2, p. 59: the date when Allen began his service with the unit, wrongly given as 28/9/30, is easily corrected from the previous entry to 28/6/16. There is a photograph of Allen and his band, 55 strong, taken in 1929, in vol. 3, p. 6.

[15] I am very grateful to Major Turner, to Staff Sergeant Franck Leprince, Chief Reference Librarian of the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall, and to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the International Military Music Society, John Ambler and Colin Dean, for their generous help in investigating this matter.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

certainly was; but, although I have shown that he had professional help in the early stages of his musical education, it remains true that in the more advanced study of musical technique, analysis, and history he was self-taught. He worked away on his own, outside the normal institutions, and this may explain why he came to be attracted to composers who had trodden the same path: Borodin, whom he described as 'the supreme justification of the amateur in music',[16] Rimsky-Korsakov, Musorgsky. 'I've never been educated, I taught myself!', he told R. J. Wiley: 'This is the only thing to do. Everything, really, I suppose, I taught myself as it became necessary to know it.'[17] That meant, of course, that his opinions were hard-won and individual and owed little to the conventional wisdom of the schools. All the same, his early experience in the knockabout world of musical journalism was to remove from his character any trace of the truculent self-assertiveness that one sometimes meets with in autodidacts who have formed their ideas in isolation and unchallenged.[18]

How serious was Abraham's desire to compose? Winton Dean writes that 'He once told me that he had to compose, though he knew it was no good.' Never mind, the attempt taught him something valuable: as the late Peter Wishart once commented to me when we were talking of Abraham's writings, particularly his admirable little book *Design in Music*,[19] 'He thinks like a composer.' That explains his ability, with little skill as a performer, to read a score and enter a composer's mind in imagination, and his readiness to venture on his two published reconstructions of lost music: the movement for string quartet which Wagner is thought to have expanded into the *Siegfried Idyll*, and the (as we now know) uncompleted Scherzo of Schubert's 'Unfinished' Symphony.[20] I have not yet managed to discover whether any of Abraham's compositions or arrangements for military band are still filed away in some army depot: the mention of two other bands besides that of the Royal Ulster Rifles probably implies that William Allen commended his pupil's efforts to his colleagues and passed some of them on.

It is curious, but probably coincidental, that Abraham should have followed the band of the 1st Bn., the Royal Ulster Rifles to Germany and

[16] *Borodin* (see n. 13), p. 205.
[17] 'A Recollection of 20 June 1983'.
[18] As he later said of another distinguished autodidact, 'Schoenberg was a self-taught composer and the self-taught are generally as proud of their learning as the self-made man is of his wealth.' (*A Hundred Years of Music* (1938), p. 222.)
[19] Oxford University Press, 1949.
[20] Published by Oxford University Press in 1947 and [1971] respectively.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

the Rhineland. The latter joined the British army of occupation in August 1923, and Abraham spent the year 1924 in Cologne with the intention of hearing good music and learning German. He lodged with a family, living cheaply, one imagines. We do not know how he paid for his stay; but, since he says that he 'was sent', it seems likely that his parents, having noted that his writings could earn money, decided to help him on his professional path with a little higher education and footed the bill—an act of faith, since no-one else in the family had ever shown the slightest talent for or interest in music or literature. This was an intensely exciting time for him, as he told R. J. Wiley[21] in a tape-recorded interview of 1983 (the transcription catches his enthusiastic manner of speech to the life):

> I had my first introduction to Wagner, *Walküre* at the Cologne Opera, and then I heard Mahler for the first time—I never heard of Mahler and Bruckner until I went to Germany. And also Russian music, . . . it must have been the Borodin B-minor Symphony which was my real introduction to Russian music. I thought, 'Ah! He's the chap for me!' And then at about the same time the Russian Ballet—it was no longer Diaghilev, it was called the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo—gave a season at the Alhambra Theatre in London, and they did the dances from *Igor*. And I thought, 'My, this is the stuff!'

Abraham's year in Cologne afforded him the totally new experience of living in a large city with a full-time opera house and regular symphony and chamber concerts. The discovery of Borodin's music, which was to become the subject of his first book four years later, sparked off his life-long admiration for Russian composers. It came at the right time: he knew that as a young writer, with a reputation to make, he would need to find some special area of expertise. He may already have developed a more general interest in Russian culture: he said many years later that he first learned Russian in order to read Dostoevsky in the original, and he was to publish short, workmanlike (but non-critical) biographies of Tolstoy (1935) and Dostoevsky (1936)—and also Nietzsche (1933): it would seem that his early interest in German, too, was in part literary and philosophical.[22] (All three of these books—like most of Abraham's—were solid and durable enough to warrant reprinting unchanged some thirty years later.[23]) When he writes about literature in relation to music,

[21] 'A Recollection of 20 June 1983', p. 1.

[22] He was introduced to Nietzsche by the father of the family with whom he lodged in Cologne, who advised him to read *Also sprach Zarathustra*, not as philosophy but as a prose poem. I have taken this and other material from the unedited tape-recording made for R. J. Wiley's interview of 1983 (see above n. 7), which he very kindly allowed me to borrow.

[23] All three published in London in Duckworth's series 'Great Lives', Nos. 23, 47, and 69, and republished in New York by Haskell House Publishers in 1974. His philosophical and aesthetic

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

one feels that as a man of Europe-wide culture he was already familiar with the authors that he mentions and not that he has looked them out for purely musicological purposes—that it was not Schumann who led him to Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*, nor Delius to the novels of Jacobsen and the stories of Gottfried Keller, nor even Chopin to the poetry of Mickiewicz.[24] His interest in things Russian extended to art, too: see his essay on Stasov of 1968.[25] That he perfectly understood Viktor Hartmann's sketches and drawings, as well as Musorgsky's interpretations of them in *Pictures from an Exhibition*, is evident from a typically challenging rebuke to Ravel and others who had orchestrated them into oil-paintings: he described Musorgsky's suite as 'so little conventionally pianistic that at least three vandals have been tempted to deface Musorgsky's bold black-and-white crayon strokes with orchestral colour.'[26]

Abraham's year in Cologne doubtless clinched his decision to devote his life to writing about music (and at first literature also), but two or three of the articles on music listed in Nancy Basmajian's admirable bibliography of his publications[27] had appeared in print before that time. What appears to be his very first essay in historical musical journalism in fact dates from three years earlier, 1921, when he was only seventeen—presumably his first attempt in that line after a naval career had become closed to him. It is a little article on 'Wit in Music' in an unimportant

expertise is also evident in his remarkable study 'Nietzsche's Attitude to Wagner: A Fresh View', *Music & Letters*, 13 (Jan. 1932), 64–74, reprinted in *Slavonic and Romantic Music: Essays and Studies* (1968), pp. 313–22, and in many passages in his writings relating music to the history of ideas—e.g. G. Abraham (ed.), *The Age of Humanism*, *The New Oxford History of Music*, 4 (1968), 'Introduction', p. xxii; E. Wellesz & F. W. Sternfeld (eds.), *The Age of Elegance*, Ibid. 7 (1973), G. Abraham, 'Introduction', pp. xvi f., xix; the Kantian phenomenon and noumenon are invoked, without naming the philosopher, in Abraham's *Problems of Musical History*, Gwilym James Memorial Lecture of the University of Southampton, vol. 7 (Southampton, 1980), p. 16.

[24] See his 'On a Dull Overture by Schumann', *The Monthly Musical Record*, 76 (Dec. 1946), 238–43, reprinted in *Slavonic and Romantic Music* (1968), pp. 288–93; 'Delius and His Literary Sources', *Music & Letters* 10 (April 1929), 182–8, and *Slavonic and Romantic Music*, pp. 332–8; *Chopin's Musical Style* (1939), pp. 57 f.

[25] ' V. V. Stasov: Man and Critic', in Vladimir Vasilevich Stasov, *Selected Essays on Music*, translated by F. Jonas (London & New York, 1968), pp. 1–13; reprinted in G. Abraham, *Essays on Russian and East European Music* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 99–112.

[26] *Concise Oxford History of Music* (1979), p. 777. See also Abraham's 'The Artist of *Pictures from an Exhibition*', in *Musorgsky: In Memoriam 1881–1981*, Russian Music Studies, no. 3, ed. M. H. Brown (Ann Arbor, 1982), pp. 229–36.

[27] 'Selected Bibliography of Works by Gerald Abraham' [to *c*.1984], in *Slavonic and Western Music* (1985), pp. 293–310. For an updated supplementary list and a few corrections, see Appendix.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

periodical, *The Musical Mirror* for August, 1921, edited by Ralph Hill, who became a valued friend. There is nothing remarkable in the thought or expression; but, coming from a provincial lad with only Newport's public library near at hand, the piece demonstrates a commendably wide range of musical and historical reference: it trawls examples from as far back as Josquin Des Prez (though placing the Restoration 'catch' in the Elizabethan period) and comes bang up to date with Ravel, Satie, and—already—the latest Russians, Prokofiev (*Chout*) and Stravinsky (songs, and *Ragtime*). The first two essays that he wished to acknowledge were on Scottish folksong in relation to Haydn (1922) and Burns (1923);[28] the latter was the first of a series of no less than twenty-two contributions to his favourite journal, *Music & Letters*, where his next piece also appeared, this time on a broader and more characteristic theme, 'The Influence of Berlioz on Richard Wagner' (1924).[29] Before accepting it, the editor, A. H. Fox Strangways, put him through a kind of *viva-voce* to check that he really knew his stuff, producing scores of *The Ring* and asking him to find the relevant passages: this was the 'extraordinary man' whom Abraham described to R. J. Wiley as 'a good tester—he didn't believe easily'.[30]

On his return to England, Abraham supported himself by his pen, writing reviews of music and books and a great number of short bread-and-butter articles which are omitted from Dr Basmajian's list, though her description of them suggests that it would be worth digging out some of the 'many very brief though frequently provocative pieces from such periodicals as *the Musical Mirror and Fanfare*, *The Music Teacher*, and *Radio Times*'. His 1935 application to the BBC mentions other publications, not yet fully investigated, to which he contributed: *Musical America*, the Saturday page of the *Daily Telegraph*, and—perhaps including literary articles—*The Bookman* and *The Contemporary Review*. He was learning his trade as a musical journalist (though he avoided, no doubt deliberately, the more ephemeral role of a critic reviewing performances, an activity that he took up only in later life, and only for a year). His Liverpool CV acknowledges two mentors: '1925 Engaged in the private study of music under the guidance of the late A. H. Fox-Strangways [*sic*, hyphenated][31] and the late M. D. Calvocoressi, and in the writing of

[28] 'Haydn and the Scottish Folk-music', *The Scottish Musical Magazine*, 4 (Dec. 1922), 65 f.; 'Burns and the Scottish Folk-Song', *Music & Letters*, 4 (Jan. 1923), 71–84.

[29] Ibid. 5 (July, 1924), 239–46.

[30] 'A Recollection of 20 June 1983'.

[31] Considering the amount of space he devoted in *The Monthly Musical Record*, 85 (1955), 87, to the presence or absence of a hyphen in Fuller-Maitland's name, this is a poor show.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

books and articles on music.' These were remarkable men, and he was shrewd to apprentice himself to them. But they too were shrewd to recognise his untutored potential so early on.

He would have turned to Michel Dimitri Calvocoressi (1877–1944) for his exceptional knowledge of Russian music, though he was also expert in a wide range of modern music. Born in France of Greek stock, he had been Diaghilev's right-hand man from 1907 to 1910, and was in amicable correspondence with many leading Russian and French composers—among them Balakirev, Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov, Lyapunov, Stravinsky, Ravel (a close friend), and Roussel; his English circle included Warlock, van Dieren, and Vaughan Williams. His house in Chelsea contained a valuable collection of music, books, manuscripts, and letters, and he possessed amazing abilities in at least twelve modern languages (which even Abraham never quite equalled, though his daughter tells me that 'when embarking on what turned out to be his last illness he decided to brush up his Hungarian—and did so, via a Norwegian textbook'). Any adequate portrait of Borodin, as the elaborate sub-title of Abraham's book indicates,[32] would require a contextual discussion of the other four composers associated with him in the 'Kuchka'—the 'Five', or 'mighty handful'. Calvocoressi became his guide, his model, eventually his collaborator[33] and a dear family friend, and bequeathed to him the choice of his library and papers.[34] This was to be one of the two closest professional friendships of his life (the other was with Jack Westrup). It was to Calvocoressi that he dedicated his third book on music, the important collection of reprinted essays, with ten new ones, entitled *Studies in Russian Music* (1935). And, like a Russian composer finishing a deceased colleague's opera, he was to complete and revise Calvocoressi's short Master Musicians study *Mussorgsky* (1946), left unfinished at the author's

[32] *Borodin: the composer and his music. A descriptive and critical analysis of his works and a study of his value as an art-force, with many references to the Russian Kouchka circle of five—Balakirev, Moussorgsky, César Cui and Rimsky-Korsakov with Borodin* ([1927]).

[33] They collaborated on *Masters of Russian Music* (London & New York, 1936; repr. 1944, 1971). Abraham also imitated Calvocoressi, who for twenty years provided *The Musical Times* with a précis of the contents of foreign-language periodicals, by regularly summarising *Sovyetskaya Muzïka* for *Music & Letters* and paying special attention to Eastern European scholarship in the journals that he edited.

[34] Including 'a huge wardrobe of miscellaneous papers', and a favourite recipe for what the family called 'Calvofood': 'beef casseroled with bay leaves and served with mashed potatoes coloured and flavoured with orange zest'. Two other Russianists also left Abraham a choice from their libraries: M. Montagu-Nathan and S. W. Pring. Most of Abraham's own remarkable library was sold after his death to Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Boston, USA.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

death, writing nearly half of it and further revising and enlarging its second edition of 1974. Ten years later he was to see through the press his late friend's definitive full-length study of the same composer, long believed lost or destroyed, *Modest Mussorgsky: His Life and Work*.[35]

Abraham wrote an admiring obituary in honour of Calvocoressi;[36] but he did not add his voice either to the eightieth-birthday celebrations or to the obituary tributes for Arthur Henry Fox Strangways that were published in *Music & Letters*,[37] the journal that he had founded, funded, and edited for its first sixteen years (1920–36). Perhaps Abraham was not invited to contribute; but it seems likely that he regarded the great man with awe rather than affection. Fox Strangways was an Englishman, probably formal and of the old school, forty-five years older than Abraham, some twenty years older than the mediterranean, mercurial Calvocoressi, and surely a respected *guru* rather than a friend. His principal interest, the music of Hindustan, would certainly have intrigued Abraham, but was hardly of immediate importance to him. What Fox Strangways would have taught him, no doubt unwittingly and by example, was how to find his way about the great library of western music—indeed, world music—and its history, how to marshal sources of information and select the most telling points in order to clinch an argument or combat an error, how to combine accurate knowledge with sound musical analysis and critical assessment in a concentrated article of ten or fifteen pages which, however specialised in subject-matter, would still atttract and engage the general reader. (Most of Abraham's output at this stage of his life reposes on his mastery of the short essay, though he might also plan a series of them to cover a wider field, as in his sequence on Rimsky-Korsakov's operas; his later writings, too, are concatenations of essay-length chapters.) He would also have learned a great deal merely from watching an able editor at work, harnessing together a group of disparate scholars to produce a learned but lively journal. Fox Strangways' expert and thoughtful editing of his own early articles, which found such a welcome in *Music & Letters*, would of course have been a lesson in itself.

Another important patron who had come into Abraham's life by 1927

[35] M. D. Calvocoressi, *Modest Mussorgsky* (London & New York, 1956). This major work, commissioned by Kussevitsky for 1924, delayed until 1938 so as to take into account the new edition of the composer's works by Lamm, and left in a Parisian publisher's safe throughout the Second World War, had survived the publisher's collapse and the author's death in 1944 to be happily recovered unharmed and brought to London by Francis Poulenc.

[36] 'M. D. Calvocoressi (1877–1944)', *The Musical Times*, 85 (Mar., 1944), 83–5.

[37] *Music & Letters*, 20 (1939), 343 and Ibid. 29 (1948), 229.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

remains a shadowy figure. *Borodin* was published by William Reeves (1853–1937), third of that name to own and manage a family firm which had been founded in 1825, selling and printing music and books—not only books about music—with interesting antiquarian business as well.[38] Reeves advertised his publications in a twice-monthly musical journal owned by the firm, called *The Musical Standard: A Newspaper for Musicians, Professional and Amateur*. Abraham's *Borodin* was prominently advertised in it, directly under the bannerhead, throughout 1928 and on into the first five months of 1929, at which point Gerald Abraham, then aged twenty-five, succeeded E. H. Baughan as its editor—his first regular job.

He immediately began to raise the scholarly tone of what had been a routine trade-based journal. The June issue includes an account by H. G. Farmer of Arab music up to the thirteenth century, hardly standard fare, and introduces the first of a series of collections of musical aphorisms, 'Obiter dicta', some (by Weber) translated by Abraham himself.[39] July sees the first appearance of another regular feature, 'In the Library', which gives extracts from valued books on music, both old and new.[40] As the months progress, there is more on Russian music and on medieval and Renaissance music, including an early seventeenth-century fantasia recovered (imperfectly) from an engraving around the rim of an Oxford church bell.[41] The Editor's 'Notes and Comments' start to range more widely, become more alert, more challenging: observations on 'The Kreutzer Sonata' in 'Tolstoy on Music' draw fire from Aylmer Maude (who nevertheless became a friend and helped him with his biography of Tolstoy).[42] Abraham sturdily but unfashionably defends Elgar, recently made a baronet, against the charge that he was hungry for titles: 'If musicians need honours other than those assured them by their music, there is no reason why they should not be given more than a mere knighthood. In Sir Edward's case a peerage would not have been too much; Tennyson was made a Lord.'[43] Himself a lover of the English countryside who rarely missed his daily walk, Abraham illustrates how conservatism

[38] I am grateful to John Wagstaff for much bibliographical help, and for alerting me to James B. Coover's 'William Reeves, Booksellers/Publishers, 1825–', in D. Hunter (ed.), *Music Publishing and Collecting: Essays in Honor of Donald W. Krummel* (Urbana-Champaign, 1994), pp. 39–67.
[39] *The Musical Standard*, 33 (1929), no. 567, 195 f., 200.
[40] Ibid., no. 569, 8.
[41] Ibid. 36, no. 598, 57.
[42] Ibid., nos. 595–9. It was Maude who, in the R. J. Wiley interview in 1983, gave him tea and digestive biscuits at the National Liberal Club: Abraham found his interest in Tolstoy 'surprisingly narrow' in focus.
[43] Ibid. 37, no. 615, 123.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

may coexist with a love for the new by quoting at length from an essay by his favourite nature-mystic Richard Jefferies, showing how, even if we walk the same road every day, things are never twice the same.[44] He commends the educational value of Percy Scholes' *Columbia History of Music* (eight records, and a booklet issued by Oxford University Press), an innovation which he will greatly amplify over twenty years later with *The History of Music in Sound*. But Abraham's first job did not last long. By 1931 the disastrous economic climate was reducing the journal's sales. It became a monthly, but that did not help. Abraham seems to have foreseen that he would shortly have to find other employment, and advertised his abilities by producing no less than ten musicological articles in that year, only three for his own journal. In January 1932, Reeves decided that in spite of its seventy-year history—sixty of them with his firm—he would have to kill off his magazine, and *The Musical Standard*, 'of which more issues have been published than of any other musical paper in the English language in the world, now bids its readers farewell.'[45]

Reeves did not abandon Abraham, though. He gave him the task of revising and considerably augmenting Nicholas Kilburn's *The Story of Chamber Music*, which now became *Chamber Music and Its Masters in the Past and in the Present*, for his Music Story Series (London & New York, 1932), to which Abraham, aware from the first of the gramophone's importance, added a discography—then a novel feature. In 1934 Reeves asked Abraham to translate Werner Menke's *History of the Trumpet of Bach and Handel*, publishing it with the German and English texts printed in parallel. This was followed in 1935 by a translation of Rudolf Kastner's *Beethoven's Sonatas and Artur Schnabel*, designed to accompany the first complete recording of the Sonatas—another progressive idea. Reeves crowned his patronage of Abraham by publishing the collection of essays that first made the learned world realise the full weight and scope of Abraham's scholarship, *Studies in Russian Music* (London, 1935; New York, 1936). The old man died in the following year, but not before he had (presumably) given his blessing to Abraham's second and even finer collection of Russian essays, including six new ones, *On Russian Music*, which appeared under the Reeves imprint in 1939 (the USA edition was undertaken by Scribners of New York). It is a pity that we know so little about Reeves' personality, save that, according to his successor, his main

[44] *The Musical Standard*, 37, no. 618, 78.
[45] Ibid. 38, no. 636, 225.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

interest lay in the pursuit of profit; no evidence has survived to give any idea of his personal relationship with Abraham.

Losing a regular income led Abraham to concentrate more on books than on learned articles. He produced an intelligent and disarming 'plain man's guide' to recent developments in music with *This Modern Stuff* (1933), paying careful attention to examples that were easily available to readers in the form of albums and recordings. It was much reprinted, in its third edition updated and renamed as *This Modern Music* (New York, 1952), and was the first of his books—for he disowned *Borodin*—that in later life he wished to acknowledge. The three literary biographies already mentioned belong to this period, beginning an association with the publisher Duckworth to which we owe *Masters of Russian Music* (in collaboration with Calvocoressi, 1936) and finally *A Hundred Years of Music* (1938, in The Hundred Years Series); the latter two were simultaneously published in New York by the distinguished house of Alfred A. Knopf. *A Hundred Years of Music*, lucidly arranged, cogently argued, and beautifully written, moves into mainstream musical history to survey the whole Romantic era and its aftermath (*c.*1830–1930). It was intended, like all Abraham's writing, for the intelligent music-lover, whose gratitude it certainly earned; but its critical acuity, intellectual zest and masterly 'plotting' rapidly won it a lasting place as a university text-book and a model of good writing for young musicologists and critics in the English-speaking world for two generations and more. It reached its fourth edition in 1974. The book is remarkable in many ways, not least for the author's able scene-setting, in the 'inter-chapters', of the cultural, social, and historical context of music. He is unusually just in his treatment of little-known minor masters, whose doings always aroused his curiosity, and whose ideas had often stimulated the 'originality' of more famous composers. He is not afraid to judge the latter, for he sees history as a form of criticism and sometimes administers a shock in order to make the reader stop and think. Is the first movement of Mendelssohn's 'Italian' Symphony really so unsatisfactory (p. 62)? Abraham could not then have known, I believe, that the composer was also unhappy with the work and made many revisions which have surfaced only recently. But one is less willing to agree that the *Midsummer Night's Dream* Scherzo of 1843 shows a falling-off from the magical Overture of 1826 (pp. 60 f.). If Cecil Gray likens the compressed density of Sibelius' Fourth Symphony to that of a White Dwarf star, Abraham extends the analogy to Mahler's symphonies: 'these titanic "worlds" of Mahler's have an unfortunate resemblance to the planet Jupiter, whose density is little greater than that of

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

water' (pp. 263 f.). When he occasionally sits on the fence, it can be in a deliciously feline manner, as in his discussion of two conflicting views of a passage in *Roméo et Juliette* (p. 45): which view you take 'depends entirely on your possession or non-possession of that valuable gift, so capriciously bestowed by Providence, the ability to enjoy Berlioz'.

This was in 1938, but back in 1935 Abraham's future was by no means assured. Yet he wished to get married, and his prospective mother-in-law 'told him that he must get a "proper job" if he was to marry her daughter'. When his old friend Ralph Hill, now an assistant editor for music with the BBC's *Radio Times*, alerted him to an opening on that journal as a general assistant, literary and musical, he put in for the post and got it. There may have been more to this than necessity and opportunism, though his duties were probably at first far below his abilities. He may well have foreseen the possibilities for music that the future expansion of broadcasting might offer, and the vast readership which *Radio Times* would eventually gain. He always thought of himself less as a musicologist than as an educator of public taste and had complained on several occasions, in editorials in *The Musical Standard*, about the poor quality of musical comment in *Radio Times*, castigating its inadequate support for the BBC's musical programmes. He joined the Corporation on 11 March. In the following year, on 2 May 1936, he married Isobel Patsy (Pat) Robinson, the daughter of a pharmacist and like himself a native of the Isle of Wight. They set up house in a flat in The Clocktower in Hampstead, where he could take his walks on the Heath, and there they remained until the outbreak of the Second World War, when they moved a short distance to No. 106, Frognal. On the day of his wedding he began to keep 'The Diary of our Married Life', never missing an entry until the time of his death.[46] His wife's charming personality, intellectual abilities and talents for home-making and cookery, and the gift that they both shared for making friends, ensured that their hearth became a hospitable meeting-place for musicians and writers on music, particularly young beginners—for Abraham felt it his duty to extend to others the kindness and encouragement that he had met with as a tyro. He loved conversation and gossip—the racier the better—and his pithy and sometimes outrageous observations were often driven home by thunderous broadsides of laughter. Philip Barford recalls one such sally about musical

[46] I have not consulted it for this memoir, but his daughter Frances has used it to verify a few details for me.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

mystics (apropos Cyril Scott, he thinks, but Scriabin seems as likely): 'Some musicians finger their souls as others finger their genitalia.'

Not much is known about Abraham's work on *Radio Times*, but his linguistic expertise came to the attention of the BBC's General Advisory Council when they discussed a report of 12 October 1937 on a revised scheme for the English transliteration of Russian names and titles that he had produced, together with a certain Major Atkinson. It was actually adopted in *Radio Times* from 14 May 1937, but caused some confusion and was partially abandoned from 20 August onwards, so that 'Chaykovsky' reverted to 'Tchaikovsky'.[47] His musical abilities, however, soon caught the attention of *Radio Times*'s more highbrow sister-publication *The Listener*, which, besides preserving the best of the week's broadcasts in printed form, also set the scene for forthcoming programmes with well-informed introductory articles. In 1936 Abraham contributed no less than seven of these, mostly on little-known Russian music, but also on Czech composers and on Schubert's then neglected piano works. In 1939 he was invited to transfer to *The Listener*—certainly his more natural home—and served for three years as its deputy editor until 1942. It was through his intervention that the journal published a talk by E. M. Forster on the little-known poetry of Crabbe, which the editor had at first considered too obscure. A copy of the issue containing it happened to wing its way to Benjamin Britten, then in the USA, who at that time had never heard of Crabbe; but he was looking around for a subject for an opera and was guided by Forster's talk to the Aldeburgh poet's story of *Peter Grimes*. Abraham thereafter took a vicarious pride in the opera's success.[48] When he moved on to a more senior BBC post in 1942, his encyclopaedic knowledge of music and musicology had apparently come to be regarded as indispensable to *The Listener*'s music pages, and he was invited to continue as Music Editor[49] alongside

[47] BBC Written Archives Centre, file R43/39.

[48] The story is re-told in Abraham's words by R. J. Wiley ('A Recollection of 20 June 1983'). Forster's talk appeared in *The Listener* of 29 May 1941, was reprinted with alterations and additions in the Sadler's Wells Opera Book issued for the first performances of *Peter Grimes* (1945) under the title 'George Crabbe: The Poet and the Man', and is conveniently available in N. John (ed.), *Peter Grimes/Gloriana: Britten*, ENO Opera Guide no. 24 (n.d.), pp. 15–18. Forster of course, became a friend of Britten and co-librettist of *Billy Budd*—perhaps as a further consequence of the publication of his talk.

[49] This association is mentioned in many accounts of Abraham's career, but is not recorded in his personal file at the BBC's Written Archives Centre; most of *The Listener*'s archive is not preserved there. David Brown, however, confirms that Abraham commissioned *Listener* articles from him during the period in question.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

other duties until 1962 (even after he left the BBC in 1947). His task was to scan the advance programme schedules, select a work or composer perhaps obscure or unknown to prospective listeners, and commission and edit an article from some well-informed writer. During those twenty years he recruited to the journal's columns a succession of the finest experts, often then young and untried, in British criticism and musicology.

With a regular job, he had less time for his own work. Nevertheless, up to the outbreak of war, when paper-rationing was imposed, he still managed to produce. In 1938 he wrote a good short biography of Tchaikovsky,[50] including the best catalogue of his works then available. *On Russian Music* (1939) has already been mentioned; it was dedicated 'to J. A. Westrup, who stood godfather to many of these studies'. Westrup was then, like Abraham, a musical journalist, editor of *The Monthly Musical Record*, where several of the essays had first appeared; Abraham would one day succeed him as editor. Westrup had become a close friend, and metaphorical godfathership was eventually to become literal when he and Abraham, with their wives, stood sponsor to each other's children.

With the appearance of *On Russian Music*, Abraham's two series of complementary essays had offered the English-speaking world a reliable series of pictures of most aspects of Russian music in its first great flowering from 1836 to 1910. Of equal importance, in its way, was his first book for Oxford University Press, *Chopin's Musical Style* (1939). This had in fact been undertaken as a short preliminary study for a major work, commissioned by Hubert Foss of Oxford University Press, on Wagner's musical style. Abraham had already realised the importance of the pianoforte to the textures—even the orchestral textures—of Romantic music, and, besides devoting valuable pages to the study of the then unfashionable Liszt, he had pointed to the formative influence on later composers of Chopin's melody and contrapuntal harmony (at a time when there were still historians who undervalued Chopin as a mere miniaturist redolent of the *salon* and the sick-bed). His book, the most sustained display of his skills in technical analysis, countered all that. But the Wagner study was never finished, and the box of notes and drafts pertaining to it seems to have been destroyed. Abraham said that its ideas had been used up elsewhere. It would have contained surprises, nevertheless: I recall a conversation in which he asserted, very persuasively, how important Bellini was to Wagner's musical language, even in so mature a work as *Tristan und Isolde*.

[50] *Tchaikovsky* (1938).

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

In September 1942 the BBC decided that Abraham had possibilities as an administrator and invited him to become Director, Gramophone, at first in combination with his work for *The Listener* and then, after two months, full-time. (Curiously, Gramophone Department was not a limb of the BBC's Music Department, but an independent entity.) He had early on realised the importance of the gramophone and was knowledgeable about its repertory.[51] During the war, with concert life reduced and the Royal Opera House converted into a dance-hall, the broadcasting of gramophone records assumed a greater prominence than formerly (though there was of course far less music on the radio than there is today). His duties as Gramophone Director were broad, ranging over the full spectrum of musical taste and serving all the BBC's networks, domestic and foreign. His busy department had to supply records to all kinds of programmes, with precise timings and material for announcements and presentation, often making suggestions for series and devising or facilitating new ways, sometimes far-fetched, of sequencing records into a recital. Abraham had to spend a good deal of time fielding complaints, both about the material that his staff provided and, from them in turn, about the way it was used on air. There were opportunities for symphonic works, operas, and chamber music, of course, but he had to pay equal or greater attention to 'Family Favourites', 'Housewives' Choice', 'Down Your Way', 'Marches and Waltzes' and (even then) 'Desert Island Discs'. Forced to engage with popular music, and no doubt remembering his early experience of military bands, he became more aware than most writers of his generation that histories of music 'ought not to exclude' such material: how, though, could one make sufficient space for a proper discussion of such things as 'music-hall song and Edwardian musical comedy'?[52] But, good Reithian BBC man that he was, he never lost his urge to educate and inform as well as entertain, and devised various types of programme that were designed to tempt the listener into unsuspected joys. 'The Story of Programme Music', 'Music of the Nations' and 'Background to Music' are characteristic examples.

He still devoted evenings and weekends to writing and produced two

[51] As editor of *The Monthly Musical Record*, he was to extend a hearty welcome to the publication of two ground-breaking discographies, *The Record Guide*, eds. E. Sackville-West and D. Shawe-Taylor (1951) and F. F. Clough and G. S. Cuming, *The World's Encyclopaedia of Recorded Music* (1952); he also welcomed the creation of the British Institute of Recorded Sound (now the National Sound Archive) and similar foreign institutions: see Ibid. 81 (1951), 214 f.; 82 (1952), 170; 86 (1956), 200 f.

[52] Cf. his *Problems of Musical History* (1980), pp. 1 ff.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

short books, again for Oxford University Press: *Beethoven's Second-period Quartets* (1942) in the educational series The Musical Pilgrim, and an excursion into recent Russian music—fruit of war-time enthusiasms—in *Eight Soviet Composers* (1943). For Duckworth's series Great Lives, an old stamping-ground, he revised and lengthened his short biographies of *Tchaïkovsky* (1944) and *Rimsky-Korsakov* (1945) from *Masters of Russian Music* (1936). He was a tireless advocate of Rimsky, of his operas in particular; and he was concerned that two-thirds of Tchaikovsky's music remained unknown in the West, where 'anything worth calling criticism of Tchaïkovsky is practically non-existent'—beginning his complaint (p. 130) with the pungent and much-quoted sentence, 'It is customary not to criticize Tchaïkovsky's music but to sniff at it, or to admire the tunes.' He also found time to chair the Music section of The Critics' Circle from 1944 to 1946 (he had previously acted as its secretary), and to deploy his lecturing skills, honed by many broadcast talks, at King's College, London and at the progressive Yorke Trotter School of Music.

In 1945 he founded an especially valuable and innovatory series entitled Music of the Masters for the London publisher Lindsay Drummond. *Tchaikovsky: A Symposium* was the first of six symposia in which the whole of a composer's output is discussed, each genre in turn examined by a skilled writer expert in the relevant field. (Such composite studies do not supplant the critical biography in which a single writer surveys the whole of a composer's output, but they offer a valuable complement to it; on the other hand, the editor must guard against their generic weakness, redundant repetition between sections.) In his fine essay on 'Dvořák's Musical Personality', written three years earlier for a similar collective study, also published by Drummond (*Antonín Dvořák: His Achievement*, ed. V. Fischl (1942, p. 192), he had complained that there are many composers, even great ones such as Dvořák or Handel, who are known by only a few, often unrepresentative works, 'through a little pile of scores that we could quite conveniently hold in one hand. . . . It is very wrong to confine our interest to such narrow limits and it is much worse of conductors and performers and putters-up-of-money-for-opera-seasons not to dispel our ignorance . . .' Abraham's symposia, intended for both amateur and professional readers, attempted to remedy that situation. He was to edit five more of them, on Schubert (1946), Sibelius (1947), Grieg (1948), Schumann (1952), and Handel (1954, published not by Drummond but by Oxford University Press, who took over the whole series). This was Abraham's first entry into the complicated role of editor of a collective book, valuable training for his labours as secretary and

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

later general editor of *The New Oxford History of Music*. All the symposia (whose generic title may literally reflect merry discussions of their content over a genial glass in pubs near Broadcasting House such as The Gluepot) contain thorough bibliographies and up-to-date, well-arranged worklists. The unusual prominence of the editor's role was noted in a review by Alec Hyatt King, who observed that, in a chapter by A. E. F. Dickinson on Schubert's chamber music, 'there are nearly 150 lines of footnotes signed "Ed.", mainly concerned with Schubert's creative processes as revealed in sketches'.[53] These were certainly very useful books and novel in their time, even if some contributions were too much of their time, such as E. J. Dent's amusing chapter on Handel's operas: this did little to assist the recognition of their aesthetic or of the musical qualities which have since ensured their successful revival.

Abraham's productivity over this period, achieved amid the distractions of a demanding full-time job, passes belief. As if all his other activities were not enough, in the summer of 1945 he took over from Westrup as editor of Augener's magazine *The Monthly Musical Record*, and continued in that capacity until 1960, when it became the second journal to collapse beneath him, victim of a recession in music-publishing. (His editorship will be discussed later on.) It is said that he never took a holiday, though a few days might occasionally be snatched when he was already abroad for a conference or a research trip.

His kind of research, however, did not repose on long periods spent away from base, rummaging through archives or transcribing and editing unpublished music, though he recognised the value of such work and studied, even if he did not edit, manuscript music.[54] He never, incredible though it may seem, went to Russia for that purpose (unlike an earlier Russianist, Rosa Newmarch). His very finest essays spring from sheer musical intelligence and a zest for detective work applied directly to musical texts—backed up, as always, by a phenomenal command of secondary literature and an apparent power of total recall. His comparative studies tracing composers' second thoughts are of this kind. He regarded the successive revisions of well-known masterpieces as the highest form of criticism: self-criticism by composers themselves. His

[53] *The Monthly Musical Record*, 82 (1952), 75.

[54] See his comments on eighteenth-century studies, published in 1969: 'Far too much contemporary musicology is devoted to this kind of labor for its own sake. It is indispensable groundwork and . . . much remains to be done. But it is only groundwork, the raw material of history, not true history itself.' ('18th-century Music and the Problems of its History', in '18th-century Studies in Honor of Paul Henry Lang', *Current Musicology*, 9 (1969), 49–51.)

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

perceptive examination of that process could be undertaken in his own library by comparing photographic facsimiles, microfilms, early prints and scholarly editions. In this category are his studies of 'The Scores of Mendelssohn's "Hebrides"', 'The Three Scores of Schumann's D Minor Symphony', 'Wagner's Second Thoughts' (in the 'Faust' Overture, *Der fliegende Holländer, Tannhäuser*, and the Wesendonk songs), and many essays on Russian operas.[55] All the same, he visited libraries when he had to—for example, when (doing justice to a minor composer) he needed to consult the unpublished manuscript of Macfarren's *Chevy Chace* Overture in the Fitzwilliam Museum; and curiosity might also lead him on truffle-hunts, as when he nosed about in Leeds University Library and unearthed Mendelssohn's Primo part for the cadenza that he composed for the first movement of Mozart's E♭ Concerto for two pianos, K. 365 (though Ferdinand Hiller's Secondo part is still missing).[56] His principal aim as a historian was synthesis. He would gratefully use other scholars' donkey-work, but what took his eye was musical quality. He proclaimed that he was not particularly interested in tracing influences or in close textual analysis.[57] In later life he once expressed to me his impatience with forms of analysis which seemed more complex and opaque than the music which they purported to illuminate. In his seventies he became mistrustful of musical statistics, of 'getting involved in linguistic philosophy, information theory, cybernetics, taxonomic analysis, and musical semiotics', which sometimes seemed to him 'Laputan exercises in grinding the wind'.[58] But he was admired by specialists of his own and the next generation, who knew that he could do all that they did; even so, he wrote not for them but for the many, for the interested music-lover. He revelled in the term '*haute vulgarisation* . . . what one may call, without the slightest suggestion of denigration "first-rate scholarship at second hand", non-specialised works by true scholars who, precisely because

[55] The first three are most easily consulted in his *Slavonic and Romantic Music* (1968), pp. 256–60, 281–7, 294–312.

[56] Macfarren: in his *Concise Oxford History of Music*, p. 673; both Wagner and Mendelssohn liked and conducted the work, and Abraham's enthusiasm for it inspired David Lloyd-Jones to include it in his recording of *Victorian Concert Overtures* (Hyperion, CDA 66515). Mozart: in the Brotherton Collection: see *The Monthly Musical Record*, 90 (1960), 2 f.

[57] He did not want to spoil the enjoyment that other researchers found in tracing the influence of lesser composers on the prentice works of a master, but 'no matter how much Chopin may have been indebted to these others [Elsner, Hummel, Spohr] in his caterpillar-and-chrysalis stage, by the time he emerged as the lovely chatoyant butterfly we think of as the true Chopin, he was as free from debt to predecessors as any composer in the whole history of music'. (*Chopin's Musical Style* (1939), p. x; [chatoyant, 'of iridescent, undulating texture'].

[58] 'Guest Editorial', *Studies in Music*, 10 (1976), 1 f.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

they have not been involved in the minutiae of first-hand research in these particular fields, are able to stand back and take wider synoptic views of the subjects'.[59]

By the late summer or autumn of 1946, Abraham had taken on yet another extra-mural duty as secretary of the editorial board of *The New Oxford History of Music*. All but one of his colleagues round the table were academic musicologists, able to work at research with few distractions, and the thought of a university career now came to tempt him, which I shall discuss in due course. In December 1946 he learned that he had been appointed to the newly-created chair of music at Liverpool University and would enter on his duties there in September 1947. A reorganisation in the BBC transferred him on 1 June 1947 to yet another capacity as Planner for the new Third Programme, which had made its first broadcast only eight months before, on 29 September 1946. This was a very senior post, directly under the founding Head (later Controller) of the Third Programme, George Barnes, but it must have been known that Abraham would occupy it for only two months until 6 September, when his resignation would take effect. He acted essentially as a stop-gap between the tenures of Etienne Amyot and Harman Grisewood, who succeeded Abraham in late September. The duties were general, not specifically concerned with making music programmes. Evidence survives of one bright idea that he initiated for an experiment combining new literature and new composition, though I am not sure whether it came to anything. Six poets were invited to write poems specially for music, which were to be sent without their authors' names to six composers, among them William Walton, to be set for voice and piano or whatever accompaniment they wished. Walton declined.[60] During his wartime years at Broadcasting House, Abraham had made many friendships with composers and poets as well as with writers on music. Besides Walton, who was a neighbour in Hampstead, he numbered Constant Lambert,

[59] 'Musical Scholarship in the Twentieth Century', *Studies in Music*, 1 (1967), 1–10, at 8 f.

[60] See S. R. Craggs, *William Walton: A Catalogue* (2nd, revised edn., 1990), p. 104. The project, provisionally titled 'Words and Music', was still in play on 21 Oct. 1947, when a memo from Grisewood reported: 'All poems received . . . The next step is for Grisewood to send the poems to the composers' (BBC Written Archives file R19/1295/4). Abraham, who left the BBC on good terms with his colleagues, continued to send ideas for programmes to George Barnes: on June 10 [1948] he suggested a series called 'European Classics', in which a number of literary masterpieces would have been broadcast, alongside music deriving from them. He proposed works by Gottfried Keller, Ostrovsky, Jacobsen, Mickiewicz, Manzoni, and Schiller, and in a second series by Calderón, Lope de Vega, Hebbel, Bjørnsen, Leskov, [Jan] Neruda, and Lessing (Ibid., file R/27/1).

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

Edmund Rubbra, and Benjamin Britten among his nearer acquaintance, and Louis MacNeice asked for his help in selecting music for three of his radio plays and feature programmes.[61]

The creation of the Third Programme has been described in loving detail in Humphrey Carpenter's *The Envy of the World* (1996), from which I have gratefully borrowed. Abraham never claimed to have played a large part in it, but was probably being modest. As Director, Gramophone, his department's role would have been to supplement the BBC's studio performances and relays of 'outside' concerts and operas with commercial recordings of longer works not regularly obtainable in this way, or with cycles (of symphonies, cantatas, chamber music), and comparative programmes (e.g. the series 'Composer and Interpreter'). Once he had joined the enterprise as Planner, he would have found that, apart from recordings, music broadcasts were conceived and suggested in dialogue with Music Division by the then Music Organiser, Third Programme, John Lowe, whose predecessor (until early 1947) had been Abraham's friend Anthony Lewis. But, although Abraham may not directly have helped in framing the general policy for Third Programme music, and would have had little to do with its broadcasts of new music, there can be no doubt that one very striking series was his brainchild: *The History in Sound of European Music*.[62]

The earliest reference in the BBC archives to this monumental undertaking appears to be a memorandum promulgated by John Lowe on his appointment as Music Organiser, in which he proposed 'a large scale History of Music (performed, not talked) . . . to stretch across the twelve months starting January, 1948'. But this seems to have been part of a preconcerted plan originating among the editorial committee of *The New Oxford History of Music*, of which Abraham, as I have said, had recently become secretary. The idea was to accompany the volumes of the *New Oxford History* with a lavish series of recordings, along with handbooks printing all or much of the music, at least for the earlier periods, and providing historical notes and English translations of any foreign texts. Oxford University Press would publish the *History* and the handbooks,

[61] See Jon Stallworthy, *Louis MacNeice* (1995), p. 427 (mistakenly describing Abraham as a composer). Barbara Coulton, *Louis MacNeice in the BBC* (1980), p. 69, says that Abraham advised on the selection of music for 'Salute to the USSR' (12 April 1942) and 'The Nosebag' (13 Mar. 1944) and much later (p. 171 f.) on plainsong for 'They met on Good Friday' (8 Dec. 1959), by which time MacNeice and Abraham had both become friends and neighbours of J. B. Priestley at Brook Hill in West Wight (p. 138).

[62] The BBC end of the story is told in H. Carpenter, *The Envy of the World* (1996), pp. 54, 80, 82–4, 94, 98–9.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

and EMI Records Ltd (His Master's Voice)[63] the recordings, taken from studio broadcasts which the BBC was to set up. This was a visionary concept and well ahead of its time, both as an educational tool and as a collaboration between academic historians, performing artists, a university press, a commercial record company, and a public broadcasting organisation. Abraham's enthusiasm got the project off the ground, and the BBC put him in over-all charge of their end of it, which he managed, after he had left the Corporation, from his new post in Liverpool. The *History of Sound* as originally conceived was intended to occupy no less than 104 programmes—i.e. weekly broadcasts covering two years—ranging from the very earliest surviving European music to that of the present time. It went on the air, as expected, in January 1948.

Of course there were great difficulties. The 'Early Music Movement' had not yet begun, there were no specialist conductors (save choirmasters) and few instrumentalists (save keyboard-players) expert in preclassical music, and certain of the performances were amateurish. The academics preparing editions of the music did not necessarily understand the needs of performers, and some were late with their material—both music and spoken commentary—so that Abraham was not always able to vet the programmes before they were made (and he did not, it seems, get on very well with the series' radio producer, Basil Lam). Many of the opening recitals were taken up with unaccompanied single-line songs, or with monks chanting plainsong and organum, which made for monotony; nor did each programme 'contain a masterpiece' as George Barnes had thought it should. The commentaries were on occasion found to be dry or poorly written for delivery at the microphone, and not all the contributors were good at setting the music in its wider historical and cultural surroundings. The result was that when the series came to its summer break in mid-June, a quarter of the way through, Harman Grisewood, now Controller of the Third Programme, was very unwilling that it should continue in its existing form and refused to authorise the next batch of recordings. (He had also realised that when it reached the music of the nineteenth century, which would require much larger forces, it would become very expensive indeed.) His decision upset the musical world. A condensed version of the series was then proposed, but Abraham rejected such curtailment. Support for his stand came from both the Director-General and the Head of Music, Sir Steuart Wilson, who wittily reminded Grisewood of promises given by prefacing a memo,

[63] In the USA, RCA Victor.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

perhaps in ominous reference to the likely demise of the series, with a quotation from the offertory of the Requiem Mass: '*Quam olim Abrahae promisisti*'. In the end Grisewood agreed to a second *tranche*, provided that it stopped short at Beethoven (after whose time the repertory was thought, wrongly, to be more familiar); so the BBC's contribution to the great conception died in mid-career.

As a final torment for Abraham, the BBC apparently deleted the recordings before they could be handed over to HMV.[64] The music therefore had to be recorded anew in the studio (which however allowed for some revision, greater polish in performance, and the addition of more very early music). The later examples of post-Beethovenian music were now included, but were reduced in number. Abraham had agreed to act as general editor of the accompanying handbooks, but in the event finished up doing the lion's share of the detailed work himself, for Jack Westrup failed to deliver volumes 4–6. This important set of recordings and commentaries, matched only by the *Archiv* series of the Deutsche Grammophon=Gesellschaft, was published in ten volumes by Oxford University Press and HMV between 1953 and 1959, over thirty years ahead of the long-delayed completion of *The New Oxford History of Music* itself (in ten matching volumes, 1954–90), which it had been designed to illustrate. It is therefore not surprising that the later volumes of the history no longer contain cross-references to the recordings. The style of many of the performances, later re-issued from 1957 as long-playing discs, would be found well out of date long before 1990, but not until a generation of lecturers on music and their students, and interested music-lovers, had learned to be grateful for the many rarities that they offered.

As so often in Abraham's biography, the pursuit of a long-term enterprise has disturbed the annual sequence of chronology. The decision of Liverpool University in 1946 to turn the James Alsop Fund for visiting lecturers in music into a part-time chair of music (later called the James and Constance Alsop Chair) might have been made with Abraham in mind.[65] The university did not then offer a B.Mus. degree, only a BA in

[64] So Carpenter says; but the Prospectus for *The History of Music in Sound* issued by HMV and OUP (1953) puts it more diplomatically: 'For both technical and editorial reasons it was found impractical to use recordings of the actual broadcasts' (p. 5). There is a striking if rather murky photograph of Abraham in his late forties, bushy-browed, with unruly black hair, and looking very determined, on p. 17.

[65] The place of music in the life of the university and the city, and developments leading to the creation of the Alsop Chair, are outlined by Stainton de B. Taylor in *Two Centuries of Music in*

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

Music with at first only a few undergraduates, so that the post was to be more like a research fellowship, with little undergraduate teaching or departmental administration, but with the light duty of giving public general lectures and also, of course, supervising such postgraduates as might apply. The appointment was to be for five years, renewable for further such terms. Abraham had to compete with a strong field of candidates. He had no university training or experience, but he had published much and to great acclaim, and was backed by powerful referees: E. J. Dent (formerly Professor at Cambridge), Westrup (by then Barber Professor at Birmingham), Egon Wellesz,[66] historian, composer and Oxford don, and Victor Hely-Hutchinson, also a composer, who had recently left the Birmingham Chair for the BBC. One of the external advisors was Adrian Boult, conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and formerly the BBC's Head of Music, whose father was a Liverpool businessman and who had in fact urged Abraham to apply. Travelling up for the interview, Abraham found that Boult was on the same train. Greatly embarrassed at a possible breach of decorum, he pretended to be asleep, but Boult woke him up and chatted encouragingly about his coming success, which he said was a foregone conclusion. On arrival he insisted on showing Abraham round Liverpool, on dining with him and on the morrow breakfasting with him at the Adelphi Hotel, and finally on escorting him to the University, where the rest of the appointing committee came across them seated together in close converse outside the

Liverpool (Liverpool, 1976); see especially pp. 37–8, 50–4, 82. See also Thomas Kelly, *For Advancement of Learning: The University of Liverpool, 1881–1981* (Liverpool, 1981), 357–8. For much of the detail about Abraham's appointment I am indebted to Mr Adrian Allan (see above n. 4). The Selection Committee for the chair noted in December 1946 that Abraham was 'the only one of the candidates who possesses no formal musical diplomas or University degrees', so their choice was something of an act of faith. Soon after this, the University's Annual Report for 1947–8 (Nov. 1948), in announcing his arrival, credits him with an FTCL diploma (Fellowship of Trinity College, London): this was his first honorary award and was made in 1948, as Chris Orland of Trinity College London (the examining body) has kindly confirmed after a considerable search; I am also grateful to Roger Pope, Warden and Archivist of Trinity College of Music, for his help.

[66] Two of Abraham's letters to Wellesz are quoted on pp. 215 f. of Caroline Cepin Benser's *Egon Wellesz (1885–1974): Chronicle of a Twentieth-Century Musician*, American University Studies, Series IX, History, vol. 8 (Peter Lang: New York, etc., 1985). The first, dated 3 Feb. 1956, congratulates Wellesz on securing performances of his compositions, but warns him that 'you have—in one sense—to *live down* your reputation as a scholar in order to get recognized at your true value as a composer'. After the success in Düsseldorf of Wellesz's Fifth Symphony, he neatly reverses the proposition: to become better known as a composer 'will make people think you are only an amateur as a scholar' (15 Nov. 1958).

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

interview room. Abraham thought that this appearance of favouritism would sink his chances; but Boult (and his impressive record) prevailed, and he was appointed.

Shortage of funds meant that, although Abraham was not officially described as a part-time Professor, he was contracted to spend only two terms of the year in Liverpool, normally Autumn and Lent. This suited him very well, though it entailed a quite considerable drop in earnings, compared with his BBC salary. Neither Pat nor he knew Liverpool, and they were never happy living there (at a university flat in 8, Aigburth Drive); but they were able to escape at weekends to the countryside of North Wales or The Wirral, where their friends Margie and Norman Cullen had a house. Christmases and the long summer break, unless he travelled to Europe on a research trip, were spent in their beloved Isle of Wight, where they bought Limerstone Cottage in Brighstone; here they could continue their generous hospitality to many visitors from London and, increasingly, from abroad. In Liverpool Abraham suddenly had little to do except research. Partly because of his broad responsibilities as secretary for *The New Oxford History* and the *History of Music in Sound* (which were to expand unconscionably, as we shall see), and partly because he saw a certain danger in being typed as a Russianist, he began to widen his interests and ambitions. His *Concise Oxford History of Music*, though not published until 1979, was conceived in Liverpool, where he 'began to collect scores and books and what not for it'—it was characteristic that the scores are mentioned first: for Abraham, history started from the music.

Since he was no executant, and in any case was away for six months of the year, concert-arranging and conducting were left to others, as they had formerly been. In the later 1950s, the number of undergraduates taking music increased. Much of the work involved in arranging for their practical tuition and training in harmony and counterpoint alongside Abraham's history classes, and indeed examining them each summer (when the Professor was away), came to fall on his single assistant, Philip Barford, whose lectureship, beginning in 1950, was divided between the departments of Extra-Mural Studies and Music. Barford became an admiring friend, grateful for fatherly advice, and Abraham, who liked his philosophical view of musical history, fostered his writing career. Abraham's far-famed expertise in Russian and Slavonic music and in German music of the nineteenth century attracted a few good postgraduate research students, mostly on secondment from other universities, such as Gerald Seaman and David Lloyd-Jones. The latter, well-known as conductor, scholar and first musical

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

director of what is now Opera North, became a life-long friend and eventually a near neighbour in Sussex. (Geoffrey Norris, however, also a pupil, studied with him after he had left Liverpool.)

Barford ranked Abraham 'with the great European scholars of former times. . . . Just by being with him, my own musical education was being continuously enriched. His store of reference, all quoted from memory, seemed inexhaustible.' From Barford we learn of 'the depth of [Abraham's] love of the music of Dufay and Josquin', which we might not otherwise have suspected. But he thought it should be performed with energy and vigour, and that went for plainsong too, indeed especially: '"All this gentlemanly chanting and mystical euphoria was a fake." Dom Mocquereau was wrong. "They didn't sing like that. They had clappers and all manner of instruments. And the notes were longs and shorts, not all the same length." In more rascally moments, G. dropped the hint that all this Solesmes stuff was really propaganda put out to entrap impressionable young men like me into the Church.' In the early 1950s, such heterodox views (which repose on scholarly reading) were not common. Seaman reports that Abraham did not seem particularly to enjoy formal teaching, but was a wonderful postgraduate adviser (though a fierce critic) who would lend generously from his own remarkable store of rare books and music. Others bear this out. He became, as John Warrack aptly characterises him in a letter, 'the *starets*', the respected elder counsellor, 'of the little village of English Russian musicologists'—he might have added Slavophiles in general (as John Tyrrell agrees): most of them owed their first introduction to Eastern European music to his writings and example. Warrack, when a young man, 'had declined an offer of some work on a Russian subject, and Gerry wrote to ask why. I replied succinctly on a postcard, "Because I can't speak Russian". Back came an even more succinct postcard: "Learn, Gerry". So I did.' (We are fortunate that Warrack had the palaeographical skill to decipher Gerry's notoriously illegible postcards.)

Abraham evidently came to know Stainton de B. Taylor and other Liverpool musical writers and musicians such as A. K. Holland, Norman Suckling, and Fritz Spiegl (a notable activist, then principal flautist of the LPO) and the violinist Isabel McCullagh, whose string quartet had given the première of William Walton's revised First Quartet in 1923 and repeated it in Liverpool (in 1960 she presented the instrumental parts to Abraham).[67] He did his bit for the city's concert life by helping to found,

[67] The parts contain revisions and pasteovers; they are not listed in Craggs, *William Walton*, pp. 18 f. Pat Abraham also has a 4-page Sullivan autograph which belonged to her husband, an incomplete 'Postlude D Minor' for piano, dated 1888 and apparently otherwise unknown.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

then chairing, the Merseyside Music Forum and the Merseyside Music Council, by supporting the creation of the Merseyside Music Club (which promoted contemporary music) and inaugurating its activities with a lecture, and by writing attractive programme notes for the Rodewald Concerts of chamber music.

He found that Liverpool libraries were poorly provided with music and books on music—the once excellent Central Music Library, second only in the North to Manchester's Henry Watson Library, had been destroyed by a bomb in the 1941 blitz. So he set about building up the University's collection. Although when he came to leave Liverpool the Music Department was not well provided with instruments and equipment, its library resources had become most impressive, rich particularly, but by no means only, in Russian and Slavonic music, books and periodicals. His successor, Basil Smallman, was pleased to find at his disposal 'the very substantial basis of a fine scholar's library, which was to prove a great blessing . . . Colourful stories used to be told about how Gerry would launch out to house clearances, sales and auctions in his car (an old Morris Minor, I think), and return laden, like a Quinquireme of Nineveh, with a wondrous cargo of music, books and records.' Philip Barford confirms this. He himself was once approached, after giving a lecture, by the Librarian of Lancaster's public library.

> He asked me, almost apologetically, if I would be interested to take a collection of music, from the estate of the (then) late E. [H.] Fellowes, on permanent loan to the university. I said I would certainly like to have it; but I would have to confer with the Prof. Next morning: hot-foot to the dept. Electrifying! A quick telephone call and we were off. No time for lunch in Lancaster when we arrived. For over two hours in a dusty room we stumbled and staggered about amidst piles and piles of music. G. would pick up an odd book from time to time and toss it aside with an impatient snort: "Rubbish!". I think all the Austrian Denkmäler were there. In due course, it arrived in the Liverpool Dept. where it still is, housed in its glass case. . . . Nobody at Liverpool knows now how the collection came to be there.

Abraham's administrative experience at the BBC and writer's facility with words came in useful on University committees. Smallman reports his contemporaries at Liverpool as praising 'his incisive, but always charmingly diplomatic, contributions to debate at Senate meetings. He was, I understand, particularly good at suggesting, with great delicacy, the "mots justes" for particular proposals, without in any way offending those who were less grammatically elegant or even incorrect!' In 1948 he had been delighted to receive his first honorary diploma, an FTCL awarded him by the far-sighted Trinity College of Music, London.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

Perhaps stimulated by this, the University decided to cover the academic nakedness of their Professor of Music by conferring on him his first degree, an *ex officio* MA, in July 1950. They were evidently pleased to have so distinguished a scholar in their midst and, when the time came, renewed his five-year appointment for two further terms.

He for his part was astonished at his good fortune in landing up at a university which respected musical research for its own sake and did not regard its music department principally as a means of ensuring a supply of performers for campus concerts. Elsewhere in Britain, musicology was less well supported. As late as 1969 he was to point with regretful admiration to the firmly established position of the discipline in American universities, whose scholarly production 'deeply impresses even our industrious German colleagues and inflames the envy of the Englishman with his far fewer opportunities and outlets—and an academic background which is only half-convinced of the value of musical scholarship anyway'.[68] He must have been puzzled that so many musical appointments in British universities went to organists and to composers and conductors (often of the second rank). In his obituary memoir of Sir Jack Westrup he observed that Westrup's predecessor in the Heather Chair of Music at Oxford, the organist and choral conductor Sir Hugh Allen, had resigned the emoluments of his New College Fellowship in order to avoid having to undertake research.[69] Had he heard from Stainton Taylor how Sir Hugh had apparently delayed by some years the creation of his own Alsop Chair at Liverpool?[70] Abraham was to publish in 1959 a pungent attack by Denis Arnold—a future Heather Professor of Music at Oxford,

[68] From his 'Musical Scholarship in the Twentieth Century' (1967), p. 7, an article which was offered as an encouragement and a warning for the development of the discipline in Australian and New Zealand universities; it provided a foreword and a blessing for a journal to which he stood godfather, *Studies in Music*; see also his 'Guest Editorial' in Ibid. 10 (1976), 1–2, and Frank Callaway, 'Gerald Abraham (1904–1988)—A Note', Ibid. 22 (1988), iv–v.

[69] In *Proceedings of The British Academy*, 63 (1977), 471–82, at 477. Abraham must have found the story in the article on Allen by H. C. Colles in the 3rd, 4th, or 5th edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1927, 1940, 1954). It is borne out by a letter to Allen from the Warden of New College, the Revd W. A. Spooner, dated 8 Dec. 1918 and kindly copied to me by the College Archivist, Mrs Caroline Dalton, which asks him to complete and publish his promised work on 'Musical cobour' (*sic*: sc. 'colour', though it might also read 'cobras']: no such work is known.

[70] S. de B. Taylor, *Two Centuries of Music*, p. 52. A high-powered public meeting had been called to discuss the matter, with the Vice-Chancellor presiding, and Sir Hugh was to give his advice: 'Allen was in one of his most wickedly perverse and witty moods, and kept the assembly convulsed with mirth at his sallies. This was all very well, but its main result was to overshadow the serious purpose of the meeting, and probably did the cause more harm than good.' The date of the meeting is not stated.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

but then an extra-mural lecturer in Belfast—on the attitude of our universities towards musical scholarship (though in fact the situation had already begun to change for the better): 'Musicology has never been well received in English universities. We have only to examine our learned journals, dictionaries and histories of music to realise that most of the research on musical subjects is done outside the universities. And as if this were not bad enough, there is evidence that universities are either indifferent to or even opposed to musicology . . .'[71] Abraham himself played little direct part in trying to improve matters, save by setting a remarkable example of sustained good work, by supporting the Royal Musical Association, learned journals and such series as Musica Britannica, and by encouraging talented young musical scholars whenever he came across them. His obituaries in *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*, especially the latter, overstate the case in suggesting that he made his own university department into a kind of New Model Academe, 'establishing a sound curriculum and, naturally, training a new generation of Russian music enthusiasts'.[72] It was a tiny affair with only one-and-a-half staff members, and he did not rank as a head of department. By the end of his time in Liverpool he fell gravely ill, probably a sign of discouragement and unhappiness with his life there and, according to Barford, overwork at weekends. As I read the situation, the University was moving towards a special honours B.Mus. and wishing to expand its music department into an altogether larger affair, as so many other British universities had done by 1960, and his reaction was to bow out: it would require a full-time professor, and much administration. At least one of his senior colleagues—in fact the then head of the Arts Faculty, to which the Music Department belonged—found Abraham's part-time chair 'a not very satisfactory arrangement'.[73]

The serious illness that struck him down early in 1962 was septicaemia, resulting from an ill-drained abscess on his back of the kind that killed Alban Berg. He told R. J. Wiley that he was lucky to survive, and related the near-death experience of seeming to enter a long tunnel, but then returning; he almost lost the use of one arm. When his friend

[71] In a review of M. F. Bukofzer's pamphlet *The Place of Musicology in American Institutions of Higher Learning*, in *The Monthly Musical Record*, 89 (1959), 28. Abraham had spotted Arnold's potential early on and befriended him and his wife Elsie, whose widowed father lived in Liverpool, offering them hospitality and the free use of his own and the department's library (Belfast was poorly equipped). Arnold remained Abraham's warmest admirer: see his Foreword to Abraham's last collection, *Essays on Russian and East European Music* (1985), pp. [vii]–viii.
[72] The *Daily Telegraph*, 25 Mar. 1988; see also *The Times*, 21 Mar. 1988.
[73] Kelly, *For Advancement of Learning*, pp. 357 f.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

William Glock, now the BBC's Controller of Music, invited him to come back to London and run Music Division as his administrative second-in-command—at a juncture when the daytime Music Programme was in process of foundation—he was only too happy to return and accept the post of Assistant Controller of Music.[74]

The fifteen years in Liverpool were important to him, nevertheless. Under his editorship, *The Monthly Musical Record* became an even livelier journal with an unusually wide range of subject-matter. Alongside intelligent discussion of bodies important to contemporary musical culture—reports by the Arts Council, the Royal Opera, the BBC, and so forth—productions from the world of learning received proper attention. There were reviews of the annual *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* and comments on the difficulty, but also the necessity of re-establishing the ruptured traditions of musical scholarship in post-war Germany.[75] Books are praised which most of the journal's readers would have found remote from their experience, such as the two volumes of A. M. Jones's *Studies in African Music* ('a work of outstanding interest which is likely to find all too few readers').[76] Space is found for recondite articles such as Alfred Loewenberg's 'Early Dutch Librettos and Plays with Music in the British Museum'[77] or Frank Walker's account of the obscure Neapolitan librettist Biancardi.[78] Stylish and well-informed writing was welcomed, however out-of-the-way its theme. Younger men were launched into print, though their copy would often have cost the editor extra work and advice. Even a certain Pat Abraham made her appearance, translating letters by Lekeu from the French in a series running through vol. 76 (1946). First-time authors were reviewed considerately: Barford recalls that 'G. once gave me a book to review saying "Be kind—it's his first book." There was nothing nasty about him at all . . .' Russian

[74] This came at a decisive moment of choice, the end of his third five-year stint as Professor. At the beginning of his second, he had also sounded out the BBC for an appointment, writing to the then Head of Music, R. J. F. Howgill, on 19 Feb. 1953, 'You may remember that when I resigned I told you that I should probably like to come back one day, and I think that day is approaching.' He now had a three-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Frances Lynn (b. 15 Aug. 1949), a delightful surprise in the fourteenth year of his marriage to Pat, and they were finding it hard, he explained, to continue dividing their lives between Liverpool and the Isle of Wight (BBC Written Archives Centre, File R 27/1). Her future schooling would also have posed a problem.

[75] His friend Friedrich Blume praised him for this in 'A Birthday Greeting to Gerald Abraham' (*Music & Letters*, 55 (1974), 131).

[76] *The Monthly Musical Record*, 90 (1960), 30.

[77] Ibid. 77 (1947), 243 ff.

[78] 'Astorga and a Neapolitan librettist', Ibid. 81 (1951), 90–6.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

and Eastern European music received careful attention, with strong advocacy of Janáček's operas, then unperformed in Britain; there were accounts, too, of valuable musicological writing in Eastern European languages, and praise for British scholars who set out to learn them. Arthur Hedley's work on Chopin was a case in point: 'What we need is some Engish musician with a knowledge of Polish to tell us what Chopin's fellow-countrymen have discovered about him.' This was a recurring theme throughout Abraham's career.[79]

Some of Abraham's reviews and obituaries reflect back his own characteristic qualities: H. C. Colles was 'a very fine example of a peculiarly English kind of music-critic: thoroughly musical himself and a man of wide learning and catholic sympathies, yet able to write about music with the warmth and humanity of a man of letters':[80] Abraham to the life. A tribute to Richard Capell's editorship of *Music & Letters* also describes its writer: 'a natural editor: one of those rare creatures who have the gift of attracting about them a circle of contributors diversified among themselves but all sympathetically related to their focus, so that their combined work not only preserves certain standards but takes on a clearly perceptible if indefinable flavour'.[81]

In 1949 the first of nineteen articles by Abraham, mainly on Russian music but also on British, began to appear in Friedrich Blume's great German dictionary of music, Bärenreiter's *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (15 vols. plus supplement, Kassel & Basel, 1949–79). To the fifth edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (9 vols., 1954, plus supplementary volume, ed. D. Stevens, 1961), edited by another friend, Eric Blom, he contributed only five, though arguably on more important subjects, including Schumann. Abraham began to assume certain wider responsibilities, national and international, during his Liverpool period. In 1953 he joined the editorial committee of Musica Britannica, a kind of English *Denkmäler* for our national musical treasures, serving until 1983. Editing music was not his speciality, but he gave valuable advice on repertory, particularly of the nineteenth century, though the series has not yet got round to publishing one pet project of

[79] For Hedley, *The Monthly Musical Record*,. 76 (1946), 176. See also Abraham's 'Slavonic Music and the Western World', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 87 (1960–1), 45–56 (also in *Slavonic and Romantic Music* (1968), pp. 11–22); and 'Musicology's Language Curtain', *The Musical Times*, 116 (Sept. 1975), 788 f., with praise of Jan Racek, N. L. Fishman, Boris Yarustovsky, and L. Kovnatskaya for their work on Western European music.
[80] On Colles' *Essays and Lectures*, Ibid. 76 (1946), 90.
[81] Ibid. 82 (1952), 169.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

his, the expatriate Heinrich Hugo Pierson's unknown string quartets. Although his main interests lay outside our shores—then an uncommon quality in a British musicologist—his internationalism did not diminish his respect for our native production. (He once observed, when the committee was lamenting that so few French, German, and Italian libraries subscribed to Musica Britannica, 'That's the trouble with continentals: they're so insular!') On the international front, he served on the directorate of the International Society for Music Education, the UNESCO-sponsored body founded in 1953; he became its President from 1958 to 1961, when he delivered to its Vienna convention a succinct but eloquent plea for music-teachers to make themselves aware of other musical cultures than their own. A later President, his friend Sir Frank Callaway, has written that 'no-one . . . has ever expressed so clearly and convincingly its [ISME's] world-wide educational and musical challenge as Abraham did.[82] In 1958–9 he was one of the four editors of the massive report—which appeared with exemplary promptness—on the Cologne congress of the International Musicological Society.[83] At the Society's New York congress in 1961, he amused Jens Peter Larsen by saying that he proposed to attend a concert of works by Heinrich Isaak as 'father of the composer'.[84] From 1961 until 1968, doubtless thanks to Larsen, he was deputy chairman of the Haydn Institute in Cologne—a rare honour for an Englishman. His growing eminence was recognised in 1961 by the award of an honorary D.Mus. from the University of Durham.

Abraham's principal activity during his Liverpool years, indeed for the rest of his life, was to be his work on *The New Oxford History of Music*. The full story of this enterprise, which came to consume more of his time and energy than he could possibly have foreseen, has yet to be written. It started well, with Westrup as general editor and chairman of the editorial board, Abraham as secretary and E. J. Dent, Egon Wellesz and Dom Anselm Hughes as the other members. They decided not to follow the example of the old *Oxford History of Music*, in which each volume was written by a single author: in the new, each volume would

[82] Callaway, 'Gerald Abraham' (1988); the address, 'Music in the World of Today', was three times printed, in the *International Music Educator*, 4 (Autumn 1961), 137 f., *Music Educators Journal*, 48 (Jan. 1962), 33 f., and as 'Music in the World Today', *Australian Journal of Music Education*, 23 (Oct. 1978), 3–5.

[83] G. Abraham, S. Clercx-Lejeune, H. Federhofer, and W. Pfannkuch (eds.), *Bericht über den siebenten Internationalen Musikwissenschaftlichen Kongress, Köln, 1958* (Kassel & New York, 1959).

[84] Blume, 'A Birthday Greeting' (1974). Neither Abraham nor Isaak, however, was of Jewish stock.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

consist of a series of essays by different contributors, commissioned and harmonised by a single editor (a plan not unlike one of Abraham's Symposia). Contracts were issued in 1948, asking for material to be sent in by 1950 or 1951. That was decidedly optimistic. By 1954, when my correspondent Anthony Mulgan joined the Oxford University Press Music Department,

> Volume II was more or less ready for publication, Volume III was being assembled, both being edited by Dom Anselm Hughes, and Volume I, edited by Egon Wellesz, was in preparation. The later volumes were I think to be edited by Westrup, who had produced nothing. As I remember, Gerald was brought in about that time by Alan Frank [OUP's Head of Music], in an attempt to get things going.
>
> Westrup always assured us that the next volume, whichever it was, was virtually ready for us, but that was all we ever got from him. Gerald progressively took them over, a volume at a time, [and] commissioned fresh contributions—very little had come in, and those chapters that had, by efficient people such as Alec Hyatt King, were out of date. He was a meticulously exact editor. . . . He was also of course simultaneously producing the *History of Music in Sound*, which came out far more quickly, since he had the sole responsibility. He was always tolerant and friendly . . .

—towards the publishers, that is. Alec Hyatt King, a good friend, who had evidently been made to revise his offering, and who probably knew all about Abraham's difficulties with both the contributors and the editorial board, said in his obituary of Abraham that 'he was never one to avoid awkward decisions or to shirk controversy', adding that 'seldom did he come off second-best'.[85] He must have been referring mainly to the vexed progress, or lack of it, of *The New Oxford History of Music*. While I have not asked to see the publisher's files at Oxford University Press, enough has leaked out over the years for me to venture an outline of the problems that Abraham faced.

First, when the board was set up in 1946–7, he and Westrup, the only two members with considerable experience of editing, were also the two most junior, both aged forty-two; they may not always have found it easy to manage their older colleagues. Senior to them were: Dom Anselm Hughes, then aged fifty-seven, who for all his earlier services to medieval English music was by international comparisons a rather amateurish scholar, and who by Mulgan's time (1954) 'was something of a broken reed'; Egon Wellesz, a fine scholar, then sixty-one, who according to Mulgan 'didn't believe that detailed editing was his role'; and the distin-

[85] 'Gerald Abraham (1904–1988)', *The Musical Times*, cxxix, no. 1745 (July, 1988), 366 f.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

guished E. J. Dent, then seventy, who might have made a strong chairman, had he not become 'quite deaf', though 'always amusing'. These men had formed their views of musical history in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, and can hardly have foreseen the extraordinary quantity of new work and ideas that was about to issue from American universities. The second problem, as already noted, was Westrup's dilatoriness, which Abraham loyally ascribed, in writing his friend's obituary, to overwork.[86] Abraham was 'brought in . . . to get things going', in Mulgan's words, not as secretary, which he already was, but as surrogate general editor. Westrup seems to have remained nominally in that position until his death in 1975 (Hyatt King, though, says that Abraham assumed the title a year earlier, in 1974). Abraham therefore had increasingly to propose and no doubt impose tough managerial decisions from his position as secretary while his unproductive friend Westrup, who had caused many of the problems, remained embarrassingly in the chair.

The *New Oxford History*'s second volume, *Early Medieval Music up to 1300*, edited by Dom Anselm Hughes, was the first of the series of ten to appear, in 1954. It was judged unsatisfactory and underwent immediate revision before reprinting in 1955. (It has now been completely replaced by a new Volume 2, *The Early Middle Ages to 1300*, edited by Richard Crocker and David Hiley, commissioned at Abraham's suggestion in 1977 and appearing in 1990.) Volume 1, *Ancient and Oriental Music*, edited to a high standard by Wellesz, came out next, in 1957; corrections were not thought necessary until 1986. Dom Anselm's Volume 3, *Ars Nova and the Renaissance, 1300–1540*, proved to be even more problematic than his Volume 2, but its shortcomings were recognised in time. After reviewing the page proofs the Editorial Board decided it could not be published without comprehensive revision. A measure of the problems created by Dom Anselm Hughes may be gained from a story that Abraham told Philip Barford: at a meeting called to discuss Volume 3, Hughes produced 'a letter from a French contributor [Nanie Bridgman, or Yvonne Rokseth?] which, he said, contained an apology for absence from the writer. G., looking over his shoulder, saw that the letter, in French of course, contained exactly the opposite information, and realised that the contributor must even at that moment be waiting to be picked up at the station.' Abraham was appointed as co-editor of Volume 3, in effect sole editor in charge of the revision (he also made the first of several stop-gap appearances in an unlikely role by filling in for a missing expert in early

[86] See above n. 69.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

Italian lute-music); the volume eventually emerged in 1960; there was a plan to replace it, but the time has probably passed. Volume 4, *The Age of Humanism, 1540–1630*, was taken over from Westrup—according to Mulgan—and solely edited by Abraham. It appeared in 1968. Between the dates of commissioning and publication, over a third of its fourteen original contributors had died.

By 1968, Abraham had long ceased to be an academic. He had left his Liverpool chair in 1962, and after that time his labours on the *History* must be seen against the background of full-time employment until 1970, when he retired (a word which in his case has little meaning). It will nevertheless be sensible to continue this account of *The New Oxford History of Music* to its latter end, which did eventually prove to be more blessed, critically, than its beginning. Perhaps because Abraham had much less time for scholarly work between 1962 and 1970, further volume-editors were drafted in. Frederick Sternfeld joined Wellesz in editing Volume 7, *The Age of Elegance, 1750–1790* (1973). Martin Cooper, who edited Volume 10, *The Modern Age, 1890–1960* (1974), was actually invited to join the editorial board to replace Dent, who had died in 1957; he is first pubilcly named as a member in 1968, but may have joined long before that. He was of course a skilled historian as well as a journalist, and had studied with Wellesz in Vienna in the 1930s; he was also a dear friend of Abraham. In Westrup's default, Anthony Lewis, a pupil of Dent and also a friend of Abraham since his BBC years, agreed to undertake Volume 5, *Opera and Church Music, 1630–1750* (1975, corrected 1986); but, having sent it in, he demurred at Abraham's request for further revisions, so that Nigel Fortune was engaged to finish the task.[87] Volume 5 and those which were still to appear (6, 8, and 9) omit all mention of the editorial board: we may presume that it was not reconstituted after the deaths of Wellesz and Hughes in 1974 and of Westrup in 1975, and that Abraham held the fort alone. He edited Volume 8, *The Age of Beethoven, 1790–1830* (1982, corrected 1983, 1988), the first of two volumes which I suspect had always been intended for him, but which had become greatly delayed because of all the work he had undertaken on behalf of others. The completion of the second of these was interrupted by the need for him to edit Volume 6, *Concert Music, 1630–1750* (1986), left incomplete at Westrup's death. Abraham's Volume 9, *Romanticism, 1830–1900*, dealing with the period nearest his heart and expertise, was delivered just

[87] Though modestly named as 'text editor' in the Publisher's Note, Fortune's role was much more extensive than that.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

before he died in 1988 and was seen through the press by Robert Pascall, appearing in 1990. The publishers added a Note praising 'his incalculable contribution to the whole of the *New Oxford History of Music*, for much of which he served as the general editor'.

Sixteen years before the completion of the *History*—which has finer and more enduring qualitites than some of its reviewers recognised—Westrup had assembled a seventieth 'Birthday Greeting to Gerald Abraham' in *Music & Letters*, 55 (1974), p. 131; he spoke of his friend's 'solid, ungrudging work', of how his editing had 'saved many writers from lapsing into inaccuracy or talking nonsense'; Anthony Mulgan wrote of his long collaboration with Abraham, both on his own books and on the *New Oxford History*, opening his remarks with a metaphor surprisingly frank for an academic publisher: 'This Augean task has absorbed much of his literary energies over twenty years,' [actually twenty-eight] 'and our heartfelt gratitude at his services to the History is tempered with guilt at its unconscionable demands. As author and editor we have found Gerald indefatigable, demanding, rational, perfectionist and at all times considerate and courteous.' There were fourteen more years of such service still to come, making forty-two in all, during which Abraham, besides editing, contributed over 700 pages of his own writing—enough on its own to fill one of the ten volumes.

On 27 October 1962 Abraham had re-joined the BBC at the age of fifty-eight as Assistant Controller, Music, second-in-command to William Glock, then fifty-four, who was entering his third year as Controller. Glock had embarked on a series of reforms, reshaping the structure of Music Division and bringing in younger men; he now wished to devote most of his energies to the more public activities of the BBC, namely the Promenade Concerts, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and the Thursday Invitation Concerts (a forum for unusual, often difficult, repertory for the Third Programme).[88] These additional commitments left him little time for the administrative duties involved in running Music Division, which he wished Abraham, a senior figure with long experience of the Corporation, to take over.

Another new development in BBC Radio was the impending creation of the day-time Music Programme, which was to be broadcast on the frequency occupied in the evenings by the Third Programme (and eventually

[88] For the reforms, see Asa Briggs, *Competition, 1955–1974*, vol. 5 (1995) of *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, esp. pp. 231–4, 398–401 (though Lord Briggs's *History* nowhere mentions Abraham); also relevant are Carpenter, *The Envy of the World*, and Sir W. Glock, *Notes in Advance: An Autobiography in Music* (1991).

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

to be merged with it, alas, as Radio-3). Glock's first contact with the idea came in 1961; it had little appeal for him, and had been conceived earlier in Broadcasting House: 'I do not think any of it originated in the minds of musicians.' Its budget was to be under the control of the Home Service, and the office of its first head (or Chief Assistant), John Manduell, was to be located not in Music Division at Yalding House, but in Broadcasting House. In spite of his doubts, Glock had to show willing, and it seems likely that he recruited Abraham at that time because he needed an authoritative figure who would have faith in the new programme's educative potential, to help him to negotiate with Broadcasting House and other interested parties and to draft public pronouncements on the subject when the time came. Abraham collaborated with him on a document, 'The BBC's Music Policy', which seems to have fulfilled both functions, first as an internal report including some advance discussion of the Music Programme and dated February 1963, and then, two months later, as a public lecture by Glock on 10 April.[89] Since 1962, however, planning for the new programme had been conducted under its own appointed head. The Music Programme started broadcasting on 30 August 1964—at first only on Sundays—and thereafter, although Glock had hoped that Abraham would feed ideas into its repertory, it appears that he did not.[90] His days were no doubt fully taken up with administration (and his spare time and energies with scholarship); his contract did not require him to produce programmes, and he probably felt that the new network would thrive in the hands of the lively and energetic Manduell without any further input from himself.

His return to London meant that he and Pat no longer needed to maintain two homes. They sold Limerstone Cottage, too far away for commuting to the capital, too small to accommodate the books and music already there, let alone a re-united library. Winton Dean once visited Abraham's home on the Island, 'where his study contained huge

[89] Carpenter, *Envy*, pp. 225 f, gives an excerpt from the report; the lecture was printed as BBC Lunchtime Lectures, 6 ([London, 1963]) and as an Appendix in Glock, *Autobiography*, 200 ff. Glock's memoirs make no reference to Abraham or his assistance.

[90] Sir John Manduell kindly answered my enquiries about Abraham's intended involvement and specific programme contributions: 'You are broadly correct in that theoretically Gerry's translation to Yalding had as one of its objectives the notion of giving me a hand in setting up the Music Programme. William [Glock] used to repeat in the course of the many discussions he and I shared in 1962–1964 that Gerry would be anxious to make an important input. However, I have to tell you that I can recall no occasion on which that anxiety translated itself into action.' The BBC's file of policy-discussions relating to the proposed Music Programme, 1960–4, contains no documents or annotations by Abraham (Written Archives Centre, R34/1034/1).

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

piles of books and scores on the floor for which there was no room on the shelves. He could only just get to his desk; how he found what he wanted I cannot imagine.' Leaving Brighstone must have occasioned deep regret, for they had enjoyed a number of close friendships in West Wight, though J. B. Priestley and Jacquetta Hawkes, and Louis MacNeice and Hedli Anderson (who had taken a cottage on the novelist's estate at Brook Hill) had recently left the island. Abraham had advised Priestley when he wanted to start a chamber music festival in his house, introducing him to the Amadeus String Quartet. Typically, his reflections on the experience of helping to create a musical oasis in previously barren terrain led him to insights about the importance of similar private initiatives in nineteenth-century Russia.[91] For their new home on the mainland the Abrahams managed to find a converted village school, offering a large studio which they lined with shelving to make a capacious library. This was the Old School House at Ebernoe, deep in the Sussex countryside—not far, in fact, from Edward Elgar's retreat at Brinkwells. Three old friends and their families lived fairly close at hand, or would shortly move to the area: Winton Dean, Jack Westrup, and Anthony Lewis; the group, who interchanged frequent visits, became known as a 'little Valhalla' of retired warriors. And there Pat and Frances Abraham continue to live, in lovely surroundings which still seem to echo with the family's fabled hospitality. When I first got to know Abraham more closely in 1967, at the end of his BBC career, I ventured to commiserate with him on his long daily commuting from Ebernoe to W1. Not a bit of it. 'When else,' he asked, 'would I read all my journals?', opening his briefcase and flourishing the latest *Acta Musicologica*. He was indefatigably curious about music. On another occasion I happened to mention to him, in connection with my research on fifteenth-century English faburden (a kind of improvised vocal harmony) that I had come across an account of singing in parallel sixths in an obscure late-medieval Czech monastic chronicler. 'Ah yes,' he said, 'it's in Batka.' And so it is.[92] He seemed to have read everything, and could remember everything.

His last five-year term at the BBC apears to have been enjoyable, if

[91] 'Creating a Musical Tradition', *Journal of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts*, 115 (May 1967), 417–29; the annual festival described on p. 120 is Priestley's, instituted in autumn, 1953 (see V. Brome, *J. B. Priestley* (1988), pp. 323, 376, but without mention of Abraham). I wondered whether Priestley might have returned the compliment by portraying an Abrahamian figure in his *Festival at Farbridge* (1951), but music plays only a minor role in the novel.

[92] R. Batka, *Die Musik in Böhmen* (Berlin, 1906).

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

uneventful. He gave some interesting talks on the Third Programme and continued to write pithy articles for *The Listener*; but he failed in his attempts to get announcers to adopt the correct stress (on the first syllable) when pronouncing the surname of the Hungarian Antal Dorati, conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. He had contrived, most unusually, to negotiate a five-year contract exceeding by three years the BBC's normally rigid rule of retirement at sixty, under which he should have left in 1964. He was evidently very useful to Glock, who asked for his tenure to be still further extended, but this was not permitted. Abraham's last major service to the Corporation was to conceive, plan and launch that excellent series, the BBC Music Guides, short, well-informed, well-illustrated monographs on some important genre within a major composer's output. The first appeared in 1967 (was this why an extension of tenure was requested?), and Abraham remained general editor until 1975. The series proved very successful, and many volumes were translated into many foreign languages, but it was sold off some years ago to another publisher.

After retiring from the BBC on 9 September 1967, he served for a year in the unaccustomed guise of music critic on the *Daily Telegraph*, an invitation mediated by his great friend Martin Cooper, the paper's chief music critic.[93] He was to replace Peter Stadlen, who was taking sabbatical leave for a year's visiting fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford; but Cooper himself was also unusually busy editing Volume 10 of *The New Oxford History of Music* and preparing his last book, *Beethoven: The Last Decade* (1970), so that Abraham may in effect have replaced him also. He had always enjoyed writing short 'think-piece' articles for newspapers, and had deputised on occasion for Ernest Newman in *The Sunday Times*; in a sense he was coming home, and his well-informed and wide-ranging 'World of Music' articles may have reminded older readers of his contributions to the *Telegraph*'s Saturday page in the nineteen-twenties; but reviewing concerts and opera was for him a new departure. Sometimes literally a departure: a colleague has hinted that on occasion he lost patience with long concerts which threatened to make him miss the last train home to Ebernoe, so that a review of Beethoven's Ninth once appeared which made no reference to the singers in the choral finale. In 1967 he also began a ten-year stint as a member of the Directorium of the

[93] M. H. Brown understood that he was chief music critic, but that seems not quite right ('Introduction', *Slavonic and Western Music* (1985), p. x). The first article under Abraham's by-line appeared on 13 Oct. 1967, the last on 14 Sept. 1968. I am most grateful to Alexandra Erskine, Librarian of the *Daily Telegraph*, for so readily assisting my enquiries.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

International Musicological Society; he had been serving on the editorial board of its journal, *Acta Musicologica*, since 1962, and continued until 1971.

He spent the academic year 1968–9 in the USA as Ernest Bloch Professor of Music at the Berkeley campus of the University of California, which houses a music department of the highest musicological distinction. His Ernest Bloch Lectures, delivered in April and May 1969, were published five years later by the University of California Press, and in England by Oxford University Press, as *The Tradition of Western Music* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1974). The lectures weave into one connected argument some of his old, and many new, observations on the diverse elements, musical and otherwise, that assist or affect—or hinder—the formation of a national musical tradition: the Lutheran chorale and the organ keyboard in Bach; conversely, the absence of the organ and the lack of musical notation in the early Russian church; the formative influence of language on Czech and Hungarian melody; the importance of the piano to the German Romantics; the value and limitations of church organists in Victorian musical culture (a theme earlier explored by Bernard Shaw).[94]

In 1968 his finest collection of essays was published, in an exceptionally handsome format, by Faber and Faber: *Slavonic and Romantic Music*. One is tempted to proclaim that the twenty-nine essays (two of them new) represent a harvest of his ripest thinking, and so in a sense they do. But very few are recent: one piece dates from the nineteen-twenties, four from the nineteen-thirties, and seventeen from the nineteen-forties. With Abraham, ripeness came early. I need hardly say more than I already have about a volume so often and so justly celebrated; but I have not previously alluded to its author's wit. Dry, as when he talks of E. T. A. Hoffmann's operatic treatment of La Motte Fouqué's *Undine*: 'Fouqué himself prepared the libretto, a circumstance less advantageous than one might suppose.' Non-PC, as when, speaking of the opening movement of Glazunov's fifth string quartet, he guys the usual cliché that contrasts a masculine first subject in sonata form with a feminine second subject: 'the lyrical second subject has what one might call a homosexual relationship with the first'. Positively poetic in its contempt for the theme of the 'Diabelli' Variations (which Beethoven himself called a *Schusterfleck* or

[94] He is wrong, though, about the influence of Corneille's and Racine's alexandrines on the *livrets* of early French opera—he was less well read in French, and presumably had not looked at their plays, nor indeed at Quinault's opera texts: a rare slip. Several topics explored in the lectures were first adumbrated in Abraham's 'Creating a musical tradition' (1967).

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

cobbler's patch), as when he writes of the conjurer Beethoven's 'power of producing a series first of rabbits, then of larger fauna from a miserable little Diabelli trilby'—in the last four words, the dismissive iteration of 'i's, 'l's, and 'b's is worthy of John Updike.

On his return to England, or soon after, Abraham became chairman of the advisory board for another important enterprise, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.[95] His wide acquaintance among German musical scholars and fluent command of the language proved valuable in negotiations about the possibility that 'Grove 6' might unite with or share material with its German equivalent, Friedrich Blume's *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*; these proved abortive (though the discussions persuaded the Germans that the next edition of their typographically opaque dictionary ought to be made 'mehr Grovehaft'). Abraham also had the task of helping to persuade the *New Grove* board not to go too far in accommodating Mantle Hood's suggestion that they should abandon their traditional emphasis on western music and produce a dictionary of world musics. In the *New Grove*, four of the five articles he had written for the fifth edition were reprinted almost as they stood; he wrote two new ones, on Rimsky-Korsakov and on Russian art-music from the earliest times to 1917.

It is curious that so great an exponent of Russian music neither visited Russia nor had his work properly recognised by the USSR. Calvocoressi had at least paid one visit, and had been honoured for his services. One reason for Abraham's not travelling to the Soviet Union was personal: though he had an excellent literary command of the Russian language, he had never had to speak it, and feared embarrassment at his lack of fluency (with Yury Shaporin, who became a friend and correspondent, he conversed in German). But the real stumbling-block was that he had said from the first what he honestly thought about the difficulties that state control created for composers in the USSR, and had ventured adverse criticisms of some of their music. In *Eight Soviet Composers* he had written that Soviet aesthetic principles exercised an 'almost crippling restraint on such talented musicians as Shostakovich and Knipper, to say nothing of their limiting effect on Shebalin, Khachaturyan and many others'. Yet he did not make the mistake of other, less well-informed writers who imagined that socialist realism was a doctrine entirely new: in his chapter on Shaporin he traces the Soviet attitude back through

[95] 20 vols., ed. S. Sadie (1980).

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

Tolstoy's tract *What is Art?* to mid-nineteenth-century critics such as Chernïshevsky, Dobrolyubov, and Pisarev.[96]

Most of the studies in that book had first appeared individually in *The Monthly Musical Record*, and when he became its editor in 1945 he continued to write about recent Russian music, often giving further offence. Shaporin's *On the Field of Kulikovo* 'proved to be contemporary only in date'—which explains why, when the composer, having later got to know him, gave him a score, he inscribed it 'To dear Gerald Abraham, my strict critic.'[97] That was at the Prague Festival of May 1947, where Abraham also first met Shostakovich. The two disliked each other on sight, and Shostakovich may now be identified as the 'creature' you might find 'if you turned over a stone in the garden', mentioned in R. J. Wiley's 'Recollection'.[98] In 1949 Abraham was again caustic about Soviet aesthetics; in 1950 he published an article by M. Montagu-Nathan on 'The decomposition of Russian music', and in 1960 another critical piece by his young friend David Brown on 'Soviet Music, 1960'.[99] These sins were not to be forgotten. But I am no Russianist, and will now let David Brown, who is, take up the tale, though once again we shall get ahead of ourselves. He wrote to me as follows (the square brackets are his):

> In 1974 I published a life-and-works of Glinka . . . and it turned out (as Gerald pointed out to me) to be the largest study of its kind ever published on the Russian composer, even in Russia itself. Because it was so large, in April 1976 it attracted the attention of the main Soviet music periodical, *Sovyetskaya muzïka*. The verdict was blistering; I was the 'Southampton know-all', and so on. I had dedicated the book to Gerald, and this, the Soviet reviewer ('A Journalist') decided, explained everything. Earlier Gerald had been abused in the Soviet press and this time the description of him was relatively mild—'the

[96] Abraham, *Eight Soviet Composers* (1943), pp. 8, 91.

[97] *The Monthly Musical Record*, 76 (1946), 1. The family still have the score. Abraham said that Shaporin asked him what the English for 'strogy' was, and he replied 'strict', thinking of the Russian for 'strict counterpoint'; 'severe' might have been better.

[98] 'Recollection of 20 June 1983'. The cassette recording that Wiley made also narrates an amusing account (by an unnamed Bulgarian composer) of how Shaporin—'my favourite Soviet composer . . . He was a dear'—sabotaged a lecture by the unpopular Shostakovich, to which he was forced to listen (being seated on the platform), by gradually edging a glass of water nearer and nearer to the edge of the table, in full view of the audience, until it fell to the floor with a resounding crash. Shaporin himself told Abraham that Prokofiev, when, as was frequently the case, he was in a room graced by a portrait of Stalin, was in the habit of ostentatiously seating himself with his back to it; he would also, whenever Stalin was praised in his presence, suddenly be racked by 'an absolutely strangling cough'. These engaging traits would not on their own, however, have influenced Abraham's just estimate that Prokofiev (whom he never met) 'is a much better composer than Shostakovich' (*Eight Soviet Composers*, p. 42).

[99] *The Monthly Musical Record*, 79 (1949), 58–60; Ibid. 80 (1950), 69–72; Ibid. 90 (1960), 174.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

well-known "friend" of Russian music and literature, an active agent [*sic*!] in many English publishing firms, and [the ultimate offence] late of the BBC'. A smattering of his pronouncements on Glinka were quoted, and then, finally, we were linked for a joint condemnation: 'Forty years have passed since Gerald Abraham shared these revelations with his readers, and here's a newly arisen Beckmesser knocking up a fortune trying in vain to uncrown the genius of the founder of Russian musical classicism.'

My view of all this codswallop was that it was so over-the-top that I could take it rather as a joke. So, having translated it, I sent a copy to Gerald. His reaction was very different. Within a fortnight he was to go to Russia for the first time in his life as a member of a delegation from the British Academy which had the aim of widening cultural and scholarly contacts 'in the spirit of the Helsinki agreement of 1973'. Now, having read what 'A Journalist' had written about him, Gerald told me that 'if that's what they still think about me, I'm not going', and he promptly pulled out of the delegation. Later he discovered that this had caused something of a stir, and that the British Embassy in Moscow had been drawn in. . . . he later told me that Keldïsh, one of whose ex-students was evidently the editor of *SovM*, wrote to him that he had told this former pupil that 'hatchet jobs' of the sort that had been accorded my work were now out of order. This did, it seems, produce a visible shift in Soviet policy in reviewing Western material concerned with music, though in practice this seems to have been simply not to review any Western publication unless it was written by a 'safe' far leftist.

Frances Abraham says that her father developed 'a great affection' for Yury Keldïsh, the leading Soviet musicologist of his generation. He met many leading Eastern European musicians and scholars on his various trips, usually for the British Council, to Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary. He was touched to receive a commemorative medal from Hungary following the death of the composer and folklorist László Lajtha (d. 1963), whose works he had commended to the BBC. In the 1970s, probably in 1972 or soon after, he wept when he received an honour for his services to Hungarian music in the shape of a medal stamped with the head of Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967),[100] for the great man had become a real friend and had visited Ebernoe, where he had admired the 'cricketists' on the village green and had identified a manuscript translation into German of the greater part of Béla Bartók's book *Hungarian Folk Music*—which, some years earlier, Frances Abraham had

[100] I am grateful to Márta Vandulek, curator of the Kodály Zoltán Emlékmúzeum és Archívum in Budapest, and to Dr László Eösze, former member of the Kodály Memorial Committee, for suggesting the probable date and purpose of the award, whose citation has been lost; also to the Hungarian Cultural Centre, London, and to Dr Ferenc Bonís, President of the Hungarian Kodály Society.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

persuaded her father not to throw out—as written in the hand of Bartók's first wife.

The University of California crowned Abraham's tenure of the Ernest Bloch Chair with an honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts in 1969, which was to be followed on his return to England (and nominal retirement) by similar distinctions. The Royal Academy of Music made him an Hon. RAM in 1970; his old university, Liverpool, gave him an honorary D.Mus. in 1978, and a year later the University of Southampton did likewise, eliciting from him a lecture that distils his ripest wisdom and experience, *Problems of Musical History*.[101] In 1980 (not 1982, as some accounts have it) he was elected to Corresponding Membership in the American Musicological Society. He served for five years (1969–74) as President of the Royal Musical Association, ushering in its second century with a paper on 'Our First Hundred Years'.[102] His importance to the wider intellectual community was recognised when he was elected as a Fellow of the British Academy in 1972; he had already been serving the Academy as chairman of the editorial committee of its series *Early English Church Music* since 1970, continuing until 1980; he remained a member of the committee until late 1983, when health problems began to reduce the amount of travelling that he could safely undertake. In 1974 he was honoured with the CBE: this gave rise to a characteristic Abrahamian utterance which David Brown shall narrate:[103]

> His final rejoinder to Her Majesty at his investiture could stand as a memorial to his own work. He had been told to answer questions, but never to contradict. When Abraham appeared, Her Majesty's memory briefly lapsed. The conversation, according to Abraham, was roughly as follows:
>
> HM: 'What do you do?'
> GA: 'I write musical history. [Pause.] I'm afraid that sounds rather dull.'
> HM: 'Yes it does.'
> This was too much for Abraham.
> GA: 'Well as a matter of fact it's not.'

Abraham's nineteen years of retirement—even though the last five of them were made difficult by increasing heart trouble—were quite as busy as the preceding nineteen. Much of his energy was devoted to the task of steering the last six volumes of *The New Oxford History of Music* safely into port, though he also found time to assemble a last collection of

[101] Abraham, *Problems* (1980).
[102] In *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 100 (1973–4), v–xi, and *Royal Musical Association Centenary Essays*, ed. E. Olleson (1975), vii–xiii.
[103] 'Gerald Abraham', obituary in *The Independent*, 23 Mar. 1988.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

twelve Slavonic studies from the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies (with one new piece) entitled *Essays on Russian and East European Music*.[104] His main preoccupation, however, was to complete the massive undertaking that he had conceived some twenty years earlier in Liverpool, *The Concise Oxford History of Music*. In spite of the ambiguity of its title, the book is in no sense a distillation of *The New Oxford History of Music*, though it may be seen as complementary to it. In helping to plan *The New Oxford History*, with its several different volume-editors and dozens of contributors, Abraham must have reflected on the difficulty of attaining by such means a unified, coherent, and suitably-proportioned representation of even a single period, let alone of the whole panorama of history. A single-author survey would fulfil a real need, and he felt himself equal to the task. (Of course, his experience as general editor for so many volumes of *The New Oxford History* would stand him in good stead, though he could hardly have foreseen that at the time.) Against all the odds in this age of specialisation and constant new discovery, the *Concise Oxford History of Music*, published in 1979 and soon translated into German, turned out to be a triumphant success. It is longer and fuller than its only English-language rivals, his good friend Donald Jay Grout's *A History of Western Music* (1960), and Paul Henry Láng's *Music in Western Civilization* (1941), which do not cover non-Western musics; and it is more ready to make critical and artistic judgements—perhaps because, though scholarly and useful to the music student, it is aimed more at the aesthetic sense of the intelligent general reader than at the needs of the university curriculum. At the same time, it avoids the hagiography and hero-worship that some music-lovers seem to expect, and prefers to trace, often by means of shrewdly-chosen comparisons, the affinities that create the continuum, the line, the flux, and reflux of historical development, what Abraham elsewhere called 'the slow, natural, hardly perceptible

[104] Abraham, *Essays* (1985). One essay, on 'The early development of Opera in Poland' (pp. 122–40), originally written for *Essays on Opera and English Music in Honour of Sir Jack Westrup*, ed. by F. W. Sternfeld, N. Fortune, and E. Olleson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), offers a valuable survey, the first in English, of two centuries of Polish opera. But it contains two small slips (also in its reprint) which demonstrate, surprisingly, that the great editor was himself rather resistant to being edited. Fortune rang him up to tell him about some very recent work by younger Polish scholars, and offered to correct a couple of details. Abraham for some reason took offence, though it was not his judgement that was in question but his command of the latest bibliography (perhaps a subject more nearly touching his pride). He refused to sanction any changes, so that the quite well-known G. B. Lampugnani appears as Lampugnoni and Viviano Augustini as Augustino Viviani, both in the original (p. 150) and in the reprint ten years later (p. 124). These are tiny details, but the episode remains as a psychological curiosity.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

process of transmission from generation to generation, modified by national characteristics and these rubbed down to international characteristics', adding that with such a view of history, even in the presence of a Bach 'we shall often need to shade our eyes from the splendour of the great genius'.[105] The range of reference and level of accuracy are astonishing. A particularly excellent feature is the way in which his chapters on music in the Islamic world, in India and Eastern Asia, and in Black Africa and America, are not tacked on to Part I ('The Rise of West Asian and East Mediterranean Music') as something preliminary and alien, irrelevant to European experience and therefore skippable: instead, they are fed into the narrative at intervals, at the point where these musics begin to impinge on 'Western' traditions.

There are inevitably one or two omissions in areas where the author is not a specialist and must depend on material as yet only scantily published by researchers—English lute-music, for example, gets short shrift, though it offers a repertory of high quality which in quantity far outweighs contemporary English keyboard music. There is a continual readiness to venture critical judgements which, though occasionally surprising, engage the reader in a lively dialogue and force anyone who disagrees with them to reconsider received opinion. Verdi's *Don Carlos*, for example, is described as 'another unequal work. As in *Les Vêpres siciliennes* Verdi seems to have felt obliged to challenge Meyerbeer on his own ground—unsuccessfully.'[106] Abraham's sharpness of eye and ear and his acuity in detecting error are evident in many a footnote. Who else would have bothered to turn to the Bible (Revelation, xix) to check the text of Brahms' *Triumphlied*—that rather overblown celebration of France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War—and have noted that the composer 'omitted the words . . . "for he hath judged the great whore" but provided the music for them in three bars of orchestral unison the meaning of which would have been perfectly clear to the conquerors of Paris'.[107] He makes short work of the legend that Beethoven destroyed his original dedication of the 'Eroica' Symphony when he learned that Napoleon had crowned himself emperor.[108]

[105] Abraham, *Problems* (1980), p. 15

[106] Abraham, *Concise Oxford History of Music*, p. 727. He is also less than kind to the later Mendelssohn (pp. 612, 671), though softer in his comments than he had shown himself earlier in *A Hundred Years of Music*, (1938), pp. 61 f.

[107] Abraham, *Concise Oxford History*, p. 760, n. 15.

[108] Ibid., p. 600, n. 10. On the other hand, one is surprised to find him lending currency to the baseless rumour that Schiller's Ode *An die Freude* (To Joy), used by Beethoven for the finale of the Ninth Symphony, was originaly entitled *An die Freiheit* (To Freedom): this was conclusively

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

In the course of his long life he had contributed many essays to *Festschriften* in honour of friends: Ernest Newman, Karl Gustav Fellerer (twice), Friedrich Blume, Egon Wellesz, Bence Szabolcsi, Paul Henry Lang, Karl Geiringer, Sir Jack Westrup, and Alec Hyatt King. He added two more in 1984: Boris Schwarz and Joseph Kerman. In that year his own eightieth birthday fell, and he was surprised and delighted to learn that he was himself to be honoured in the same way. Rather unusually in the case of a British scholar, but fittingly for such an internationalist, this was an American initiative, edited by Malcolm Hamrick Brown and Roland John Wiley and published by UMI Research Press, though distributed in much of the world by Oxford University Press. *Slavonic and Western Music: Essays for Gerald Abraham*[109] is a volume of rare distinction, headed by two vivid celebratory memoirs, one from each editor, and concluding with Nancy Basmajian's excellent bibliography. The other friends among the contributors were Frank Harrison, Basil Smallman, Watkins Shaw, Winton Dean, Boris Schwarz, David Charlton, Joseph Kerman, Elsie and Denis Arnold, John Warrack, Richard Taruskin, Hugh Macdonald, David Brown, John Clapham, Edward Garden, Martin Cooper, Paul Machlin, Milos Velimirovic, and Natalia Rodriguez: a most distinguished line-up. Thirteen are English, and most were present when a de luxe copy of the book, specially bound by Oxford University Press, was presented to Abraham after a speech by John Warrack at the 1985 annual conference of the Royal Musical Association at Westfield College, London. As president, I had the task of getting the honorand's agreement to attend. 'As long as there's no fuss,' he said: 'I hate fuss'. But we made a fuss, and this most modest of men enjoyed it.

In the latter period of his life he spent less and less time in London—his own library was adequate for his needs—and accordingly had more scope for activities nearer home. He served as a governor of the Dolmetsch Foundation from 1970 to 1973. He helped Robert Walker to establish the Petworth Festival in 1979, and was asked to give a talk in the Leconfield Hall there. He feared a low attendance because, as he said to his wife, 'Nobody will know who I am.' Pat replied, 'They will know you

dismissed by the distinguished Germanist Charles Andler as long ago as 1905, but in a journal which is not, it seems, to be found in any UK Library—or Abraham would no doubt have read it ('A propos de l'«Ode à la Joie» de Schiller, III: Observations de M. Charles Andler', *Pages Libres*, vol. 5 (8 July 1905), pp. 45–8). Romain Rolland, however, refers to it in the later editions of his *Vie de Beethoven* (Paris, 1903; e.g. 13th edn., n.d., p. 61, n. 1).

[109] Brown and Wiley, *Slavonic and Western Music*.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

as a shabby old man with a black and white dog' (he took daily walks in the neighbourhood with Ben, his cocker spaniel). Gerry liked that, and used it to begin his talk. He did indeed enjoy the relaxed style of country life. He let his white hair grow to unruly length and wore old clothes, going sockless in sandals when the weather permitted. He was once greatly amused to be taken for Michael Foot (his own politics were more of the Liberal persuasion). He was of middling stature, but burly, and with a large head, so that he seemed taller than he really was. Similarly, though the determined jut of his left lower lip made him look a touch aggressive, his manner was always mild and engaging. Our slightly pugnacious photograph of him, bushy eyebrow quizzically raised, was taken at the age of fifty-eight; two later photographs in *Slavonic and Western Music* show him in his study, still looking very alert, in his late sixties (I guess) and, seated in his garden, as a sage of seventy-nine.[110] He had an energetic but very individual gait, head thrust forward, arms thrust back. The most endearing of his obituary notices recalls his unmistakeable figure on an afternoon walk, and also his willingness to encourage the love of music wherever he found it:[111]

> Some nine or ten years ago I was left in charge (in the absence of the proprietor) of a music shop. 'Inadequate' would be the kindest word to describe my capacities in this situation. How many Razumovsky quartets are there? Who was Myslivecek? What is the range of a counter-tenor? The customers asked the questions. With a battery of reference books, I floundered along as best I could: but one sure help was at hand, and all my most intractable queries I saved up, and laid in wait for the approach of salvation.
>
> Up the street would come Dr. Abraham, accompanied (or led) by his plodding dog. . . . With a confidence born of his past kindness, I would rush out with my list of questions; and he was never too busy or preoccupied to help. He explained everything to me, using words that I could understand and clarifying the darkest issues. Above all, I remember his natural and fundamental courtesy. He never suggested that it was stupid of me to know so little. Greatness is often characterised as much be generosity as by wisdom; and here was someone willing, at every level, to share his own perception of musical truth.
>
> Many of his books are beyond me, and I have not read them: but I shall remember Dr. Abraham.

Gerald Abraham died of heart failure at the age of eight-four on 18 March 1988, in the King Edward VII Hospital, Midhurst. After cremation in Guildford, his ashes were scattered at Ebernoe.

[110] Ibid. frontispiece and f. p. [1]; for a younger portrait, see n. 64 above.
[111] 'F. A. C.' [Freda Crockford] in the *Petworth Parish Magazine*, (May, 1988), p. 13; reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

He was correctly characterised by David Brown as 'perhaps the greatest of those "amateurs" so profoundly important in English musical scholarship';[112] one might extend the context beyond the field of music and place him with the likes of Sir Edmund Chambers. As Hugh Macdonald has put it, no doubt with especial reference to nineteenth-century and Russian and Eastern European studies, Abraham's writings form the 'inescapable starting-point for much musicological work of today, and his influence is felt everywhere . . . he was a pioneer who charted the territory he explored so clearly that the maps are good for many decades to come'.[113] Such tributes—and there are plenty of others —are the more remarkable when one considers that Abraham was not an 'original' researcher in the sense of one who delves extensively into unknown documentary or archival materials (though he certainly delved into manuscript scores). He was above all an interpreter of musical experience, both now and then, both living and forgotten, a seeker after pattern and meaning, a student of musical man, who knew how to use other scholars' work, and who employed his knowledge of languages and literatures and his omnivorous reading among collections of letters, biographies, autobiographies, reminiscences, contemporary critical writings and official publications such as the annual reports of the directors of the Russian Imperial Theatres, all kept on the boil in his remarkably retentive memory, to find a significance often unimagined by their original authors, when related to the music that had accompanied all this recorded activity.

Among Abraham's scholarly heirs is the highly distinguished American exponent of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian music, Richard Taruskin—who was almost literally his heir, since in old age Abraham passed on to him a precious autograph note from Stravinsky to Calvocoressi which he had himself inherited from his own mentor:[114] a handing-on of the torch. Like Abraham, Taruskin is a polymath whose interests are by no means confined to Russia, and a fine writer. I am pleased that he has given me permission to end this memoir by quoting

[112] Obituary, the *Independent*. 23 Mar. 1988.

[113] 'Recollections', *19th Century Music*, 12. Macdonald noted, however, that his estimate of Scriabin would be 'out of favour today', and that the world had not taken up his enthusiasm for Rimsky-Korsakov's operas or for the music of Grieg. But the only writer I can think of who has ever treated his opinions with anything less than respect is Gerald Norris (see *Stanford, the Cambridge Jubilee and Tchaikovsky* (Newton Abbot, 1980), 518–27, 538, 541).

[114] There is a facsimile of it in R. Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through* Mavra, 2 vols. (1996), fig. 13.1. on p. 979.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

his tribute to Abraham—from a man not lightly given to praise—which forms the final paragraph of 'Who speaks for Musorgsky?', the opening chapter in his *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue*,[115] a book dedicated to Abraham's memory:

> The greatest of all my debts, however, is to one unfortunately no longer living. Gerald Abraham was the first serious writer on Russian music whose first language was English, and his work led him for over half a century into byways no Anglophone writer had visited before. He lit them up and passed on. The rest of us who work in the field have been following in the wake of this phenomenal path-breaker, adding our little tensor beams alongside his great torches. I have drawn inspiration from him since high-school days, and many of my central professional concerns have had their origin in thought he stimulated. Every one of the essays in this book (except, of course, the last) has its counterpart in Professor Abraham's published work and can be thought of as a counterpoint to it. If the frequency of disagreement with him seems rather high in a book dedicated to his memory, all disputation and attempted corrective should be understood in the light of my overriding debt: had it not been for Gerald Abraham, not one word that follows would have been written.

Abraham was not an overtly religious man and was certainly no churchgoer, but he knew his King James Bible and derived particular pleasure, his daughter says, from the closing passage of Ecclesiastes (xii, 6–14), beginning 'Or ever the silver cord be loosed'. It was not only the majesty of the language, I think, that caught his attention. The Preacher acknowledges that human existence is vanity, and also that 'of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh'. The apparently indefatigable Abraham would have read that with a rueful smile, but he laboured resolutely on: he 'was wise, he still taught the people knowledge'.

BRIAN TROWELL
Faculty of Music, University of Oxford

Note. I am grateful to The BBC Written Archives Centre for permission to use or quote from various documents as referenced in the text and notes. I am also indebted to the following individuals, besides those credited in the text and notes, for their kind assistance in furthering my enquiries: Elsie Arnold, Lewis Foreman, Dr Nigel Fortune, Dr Timothy Hands (Headmaster of The Portsmouth Grammar School), Lady Lesley Lewis, David Lloyd-Jones, O. W. Neighbour, Geoffrey Norris, Bruce

[115] R. Taruskin, *Musorgsky* (Princeton, NJ, 1993), p. 37: reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

Phillips, Albi Rosenthal, Gerald Seaman, Professor Keith Swanwick, and Professor John Tyrrell.

Appendix: Additional and Emended Bibliography of Writings by Gerald Abraham

The list covers: works published later than Nancy Basmajian's 'Selected Bibliography of Works by Gerald Abraham' (see n. 7); works which she omits, but which Abraham thought worthy of mention when applying for the Liverpool University chair of music in 1946, or which are otherwise of some interest; reissues in book form of articles revised from *The New Grove*; and corrections. Her categories and numbering are used or extended.

I. Books

21a. *Essays on Russian and East European Music*. With Foreword by Denis Arnold. Twelve essays (eleven reprinted), on Russian, Polish, and Czechoslovak song, on operas by Serov, Cui, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Moniuszko (new), on Arab melodies in Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin, on early Polish opera and 18th-century Polish symphonies, and on Stasov. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985 [not 1984].

II. Books Edited and Translated

28. *Sibelius: A Symposium*. Reprint edn., Oxford University Press, 1952.
37a. *The New Oxford History of Music*, vol. 6: *Concert Music, 1630–1750*. Oxford University Press, 1986.
37b. *The New Oxford History of Music*, vol. 9: *Romanticism, 1830–1900*. Oxford University Press, 1990.

III. Articles and Essays

74a. 'Achille-Claude Debussy', 'Wilhelm Richard Wagner', 'Hugo Wolf', in *Lives of the Great Composers*, ed. A. L. Bacharach (Gollancz, 1935), pp. 173–89, 589–622, 643–58; reprinted in 3 vols. by Penguin Books (Harmondsworth, 1942; i & ii repr. 1943, all 1947). Rev. in *The Music Masters, including "Lives of the Great Composers"*, ed. A. L. Bacharach, 4 vols., vol. 1 publ. by Maurice Fridberg (Dublin & London, 1948), vols. 2–4 by Cassell & Co. (1950, 1951, 1954), iii, pp. 83–95, ii, pp. 363–88, iii, pp. 349–60; this also reprinted with further rev. by Penguin Books (Harmondsworth, i, 1957, ii–iv 1958), iii, pp. 82–94, ii, pp. 350–76, iii, pp. 346–58.
146a. 'Ernest Newman (1868–1959): A Great Music Critic', *The Listener*, 23 July 1959, 153.
147, 162, 170, 171, 176, 177, 181, 187, 189. All are reprinted in *Essays on Russian and East European Music* (see no. 21a).
167. Reprinted in *Music & Musicians*, not *Music & Letters*.
182. [Add] 'Introduction', pp. [xv]–xx.

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

191a. 'Guest Editorial', *Studies in Music*, 19 (1976), 1 f.
199. [Add] 'Introduction', pp. [v]–x.
200. 'Dostoevsky in music', *Russian and Soviet Music: Essays for Boris Schwarz*, ed. M. H. Brown, Russian Music Studies no. 11 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), ch. 10, pp. 193–9.
200a. 'The Operas of Alexei Verstovky', in 'Essays for Joseph Kerman', *19th Century Music*, 7, pt 3 (1984), 326–35.
200b. 'The Operas of Stanisław Moniuszko', in *Essays on Russian and East European Music*, 156–171 (see no. 21a).
200c. 'The Operas of Zdenek Fibich', *19th Century Music*, 9 (1985–6), 136–44.
200d. 'I—Ode and Oratorio in England (b) Oratorio and related forms' (with Anthony Hicks). In *The New Oxford History of Music*, vol. 6: *Concert Music, 1630–1750*, ed. G. Abraham (1986, see no. 37a.), pp. 23–96.
200e. 'Introduction', 'I—New Tendencies in Orchestral Music: 1830–1850', 'III—Romantic Opera 1830–1850) (e) Russia and Eastern Europe', 'VI—Opera 1850–90 (a) Germany, (d) Russia and Eastern Europe', 'VII—The Symphonic Poem and Kindred Forms', 'X—Choral Music', in *The New Oxford History of Music*, vol. 9: *Romanticism, 1830–1890*, ed. G. Abraham (1990; see no. 37b.), pp. [xvii]–xx; 1–59; 213–27; 322–7; 438–79; 489–533; 793–829.

IV. Entries in Dictionaries and Encyclopedias

200f. Oscar Thompson, ed.-in-chief, *The International Cyclopedia of Music*, 4th edn., rev. and ed. Nicolas Slonimsky (New York, 1938, London 1946), 'British Broadcasting Corporation' [with table of premières 1926–38], 'N. A. Rimsky-Korsakoff', pp. 239–41, 1553–7.
201. [Add] b. 'Krenek, Ernst'; c. 'Schönberg, Arnold'; d. 'Webern, Anton von', pp. 333–5, 573–4, 666–8.
204a. 'Mily Balakirev' (worklist by Edward Garden), b. 'Alexander Borodin' (ch. ii and worklist by David Lloyd-Jones), c. 'Modest Musorgsky', rev. in *The New Grove Russian Masters*, 1 (1986), pp. 77–106, 45–74, 109–42.
204 d. 'Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov', rev. in Ibid. 2 (1986), pp. 1–47.
204 e. 'Robert Schumann' (worklist & bibliography by Eric Sams), rev. in *The New Grove Early Romantic Masters*, 1 (1985), pp. 99–222.

VI. Other Editorial Activities

Add: Gerald Abraham was founding editor of the BBC Music Guides (1966–74). He served on the editorial committees of Musica Britannica (1953–83) and Early English Church Music (1970–83, chairman 1970–80), and on the advisory boards of *Acta Musicologica* (1962–71), *Studies in Music* (1967–88), and *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (chairman, 1969–80).

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved

Copyright © The British Academy 2001 – all rights reserved