

CLEMENTS, CHARLES HENRY (1898-1983), musician

Name: Charles Henry Clements
Date of birth: 1898
Date of death: 1983
Parent: Annie Maria Clements
Parent: Frederick William Clements
Gender: Male
Occupation: musician
Area of activity: Music
Author: Rhidian Griffiths

Charles Clements was born at 12 Little Darkgate street, Aberystwyth on 18 August 1898, the son of a Devon man, Frederick William Clements, and his wife Annie Maria (died 1946), who hailed from Bala. He displayed musical promise at an early age, and had organ lessons from G. Stephen Evans and A. C. Edwards, and piano lessons from Charles Panchen. His immense talent brought him the Royal College of Organists diplomas ARCO in 1917 and FRCO in 1918, and on both occasions he won the Lafontaine Prize for the highest marks in the examination. Delicate health saved him from military service during the First World War, but the presence of Belgian musicians as refugees in Aberystwyth inspired in him a love of French music. Mme Lucie Barbier, who organised concerts at the University College, also gave him encouragement. It was, however, H. Walford Davies, as Professor of Music at the University College, who set him on his career path. Davies heard him playing piano accompaniments to silent films at the Palladium cinema in Aberystwyth and invited him to join a piano trio being formed in the Music Department; Clements then studied for a music degree, graduating in 1924. Two years later he was appointed a lecturer in the Music Department, becoming Senior Lecturer in 1955 and serving until his retirement in 1963. He was awarded the M.B.E. for services to music in Wales. On the occasion of his retirement a collection to fund a scholarship in his name attracted contributions not only from colleagues and former students but also from eminent figures in the music world, such as the conductor Adrian Boult and the singer Elsie Suddaby.

Clements gained widespread respect and admiration for his gifts as an organist and accompanist. As a young man he had been invited by the Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Aranyi to accompany her on tour, but his natural diffidence led him to decline the invitation. Within Wales, however, he was known as one of the best accompanists in the business, and his services were much in demand not only at concerts and eisteddfodau but also at the Gregynog Festival in the 1930s. He accompanied many of Wales's best known singers. In 1926 he accompanied Dora Herbert Jones and Owen Bryngwyn on some of the earliest electrical recordings made by HMV, and later played for artists such as the bass Richard Rees. He accompanied a performance of Brahms' *Requiem* at the National Eisteddfod in Cardiff in 1938 and in 1944 was the official accompanist at a concert given by international artists from the Allied forces at the National Eisteddfod in Llanybydder.

Appointed organist of Seilo chapel in Aberystwyth in 1917, he opened a new organ there in 1934 to his own design: his playing was one of the principal attractions of the Sunday services at Seilo, and he can be heard on record playing the Seilo organ on a Qualiton recording issued in 1958. When Seilo chapel closed in 1989, the organ was relocated to the Anglican Cathedral in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Clements conducted the National Eisteddfod choir at Aberystwyth in 1952, and was also a very successful conductor of the Aberystwyth Madrigal Choir for forty years from 1931. The Madrigal Choir would perform his own arrangements of Welsh melodies, but only a few of these were published, largely because Clements was too great a perfectionist. But his published arrangement of a Dutch melody, 'Ein Duw sydd noddfa gref', and his setting of a Bach theme, 'Cariad Crist', became popular concert and competition pieces.

Clements, who was unmarried, appeared to his colleagues a rather shy and lonely character. Not an inspiring lecturer, he nevertheless took great interest in his students, encouraging them and bringing out innate talent, and displaying a quizzical sense of humour. They in turn had the greatest respect for him.

From around 1973 his health began to fail, and he died ten years later at Glangwili Hospital in Carmarthen, on 17 April 1983. Following cremation in Shrewsbury on 22 April his ashes were buried in Aberystwyth.

Author

Rhidian Griffiths

Sources

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