

**This is the memorial page  
for Alan Taylor MBE  
1931 - 2002**

*an archived version from the website*



Alan was Principal Timpanist at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden for over forty years, and performed there for over fifty years.

Sadly, aged just 71, he passed away on Wednesday 15th May 2002 after a short illness. He will be much missed by family, friends and colleagues.

*"What would we give to hear your voice and see your face again"*

**On Saturday January 25th 2003, at noon in the Vilar Floral Hall at the Royal Opera House, The Alan Taylor Celebration Concert took place in memory of our dear departed timpanist.**

**See below for more details**

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**On Tuesday November 12th 2002, the performance of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden was dedicated to Alan's memory with the following dedication in the cast programme book:**

**ALAN TAYLOR MBE**

Just over a year ago, the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House celebrated fifty years of performance at Covent Garden by veteran timpanist Alan Taylor. One of Alan's first major operatic projects after joining the Orchestra in 1951 was *Die Meistersinger*, conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham.

Sadly, in May of this year Alan's health failed him and we lost a dear friend, much respected colleague and a very special musician. This evening's performance of *Die Meistersinger* is dedicated to his lasting memory.

## ALAN TAYLOR

Royal Opera House timpanist noted for his definitive playing of Strauss and Wagner

ALAN TAYLOR was perhaps the finest timpanist of his generation. As well as performing at Covent Garden for more than 50 years, he was in constant demand for recording sessions of all types, from classical to jingles and movie soundtracks. He was the timpanist on all three recordings made by the Royal Opera House orchestra of Britten's *Peter Grimes*, and played on world premiere performances of operas by, among others, Britten, Tippett and Walton.

On leaving school, Alan Taylor — who was a more than competent trumpeter as well as a timpanist — joined the London Symphony Orchestra as a percussionist, joining his father who was then the timpanist. During his National Service years (1949-51), he was a member of the Central Band of the Royal Air Force, after which he briefly rejoined the LSO.

Then, in September 1951, he accepted the position of principal timpanist of the Royal Opera House Orchestra. During his time at Covent Garden he served under three music directors, Sir Georg Solti, Sir Colin Davis and Bernard Haitink, all of whom regarded him with affection and admiration. Solti referred to him always as "my safe boy".

His tuning was impeccable. When one unfortunate school choirmaster queried a timpani note needed to start his choir off for a rendition of the national an-



Taylor was principal timpanist at Covent Garden, performing there for 50 years

them, Colin Davis replied that "if Mr Taylor said that the note was correct, then it was indeed correct".

For a short spell Taylor was Professor of Timpani at the Royal College of Music, a position previously held by his father. His approach to teaching was some-

what non-academic. One rising star, now a distinguished member of the profession, arrived for his lesson and asked: "What do you want me to do today, Prof?" Taylor looked him up and down, and said: "Here's ten bob. Go and get your hair cut."

He was, however, very ready to give younger players the benefit of his great experience.

One young player rang him to say that he had accepted an engagement to play timpani in Strauss's opera *Salome* — without rehearsal. Taylor said: "Meet me in the pub tomorrow at 6.30." When they did meet, he ran him through the entire timpani part note by note.

Taylor's playing of the timpani parts of Strauss and Wagner was regarded by all as definitive. For his services to music he was appointed MBE in 1992. His legacy is his many recordings, from 78s to CDs and DVDs.

He retired formally in 1996, but continued playing both with the Royal Opera House orchestra and with other ensembles. In September last year a party was held at Covent Garden to celebrate his 50 years of playing with the orchestra. His last appearance was in a performance of Bellini's *La Sonnambula* on April 1 this year.

Taylor had a lifelong interest in Rolls-Royces, owning several models over the years. He was also an enthusiastic member of the Savage Club. He is survived by his wife, Pat, and their two daughters.

**Alan Taylor, MBE, timpanist, was born on January 29, 1931. He died of arterial sclerosis on May 15, 2002, aged 71.**

### The Alan Taylor Celebration Concert Saturday 25th January 2003 Vilar Floral Hall Royal Opera House Covent Garden



#### THE CONCERT

was introduced by Nigel Bates,  
Principal Percussion, Orchestra of the Royal Opera House

Henry Purcell (arr. Crees) : **Prelude to The Fairy Queen**  
The "Balcony Brass" conducted by Eric Crees

William Walton : **Two string pieces from Henry V**  
The Strings of the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House  
led by Vasko Vassilev  
conducted by Elgar Howarth

Walter Gissrau : **The Bicycle Galop**  
Nigel Bates, Michael Doran, Stephen Henderson & Gary Kettel  
xylophone solo quartet  
The Orchestra of the Royal Opera House  
conducted by Barry Wordsworth

Donald Cashmore (arr. Farnon) : **Drink to me Only**  
Alasdair Malloy, wine glasses  
The Orchestra of the Royal Opera House  
conducted by Barry Wordsworth

Richard Wagner (arr. Sonntag) : **The Nibelungen March**  
The Wind Band of the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House  
conducted by Sir Edward Downes

Richard Strauss : **Morgen**  
Amanda Roocroft, soprano  
Vasko Vassilev, solo violin  
The Orchestra of the Royal Opera House  
conducted by Antonio Pappano

**2001 : A Timpanic Odyssey**  
A short film celebrating Alan's 50 years  
at the Royal Opera House

Leos Janáček : **Closing Fanfare from Sinfonietta**  
The Orchestra of the Royal Opera House  
The massed "Balcony Brass"  
The massed Timpani  
conducted by Elgar Howarth

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### **Trivia for the Day**

There were over 150 people involved in performing and helping with the concert.

Despite massive numbers of brass players, timpanists and percussionists being in attendance, not one mobile phone rang out during the concert.

Every major timpani manufacturer was represented by their drums (Ringer, Yamaha, Ludwig, Premier, Adams)

Harry Taylor's original LSO Cummins hand-tuned timpani started the concert, played by Russell Jordan who took over from Alan on the Principal Timpani position in the ROH Orchestra.

The retiring collection for the Musicians Union Benevolent Fund came to just over £1200.

The Coach & Horses took more into their tills after the concert than they did on the whole of St Patrick's Day.

A pair of eminent timpanists from Milan and London opera houses were still in The Lemon Tree at 0130hrs. This exceeds the previously claimed record of "the last train home from Waterloo" at 0110hrs.

Savage Club members' tabs were believed to be running at an all time high by the end of January 2003.

Chris Terian, Matt Rich and Matt Dickinson abandoned all hope of their percussion ensemble rehearsal after the concert and also the following morning.

**Players and Helpers - a rather long list!**  
**Thank you to everyone who took part in any way at all.**

**CONDUCTORS:**

Sir Edward Downes  
Antonio Pappano  
Elgar Howarth  
Barry Wordsworth  
Eric Crees

**SOLOISTS:**

Amanda Roocroft, soprano  
Alasdair Malloy, glasses  
Vasko Vassilev, violin

**XYLOPHONE ARTISTES:**

Nigel Bates (ROH)  
Gary Kettel (ex BBCSO)  
Michael Doran (ENO)  
Stephen Henderson (VSOP)

**THE ORCHESTRA OF THE  
ROYAL OPERA HOUSE  
COVENT GARDEN**

**Leader :**

Vasko Vassilev

**1st Violins:**

Alan Sloan  
Louis Rutland  
Ailsa Hunter  
Christine Hilton  
Debbie Green  
David Butler  
Stephen Bettany

**2nd Violins:**

Yasuo Ichinose  
Robert Chew  
Alexa Wilson  
Nicholas Darby  
John Montague  
Lisa Axon  
Keitaro Takayama  
Caroline Clarke

**Violas:**

Stephen Broom  
Richard Peake  
Duncan Johnstone  
Lucy Yendole  
Nigel Bielby

Andrew Haxell  
Allen Thomas

**Cellos:**

Mary Mundy  
Brian Meddemen  
Colin Jackson  
Colin Walker  
Lionel Alberts

**Double Basses:**

John Bakewell  
Tony Hougham  
Richard Hart  
Ian Eyres

**Flutes & Piccolo:**

Sarah Brooke  
Robin Chapman  
Katharine Constable

**Oboes:**

David Thomas  
David Presley

**Clarinets:**

John Payne  
Fergus Morrison  
Ian Herbert

**Bassoons:**

Melbon Mackie  
Andrew Stowell  
Martin Field

**Horns:**

Simon Rayner  
Christopher Davies  
Timothy Jackson  
Roger Montgomery

**Trumpets:**

John Hardy  
Simon Ferguson\*  
Martin Rockall\*

**Trombones:**

Eric Crees  
Tom Winthorpe  
David Whitson\*  
Richard Tyack  
Keith McNicoll

**Tubas:**

George Wall  
John Elliott\*

**Timpani:**

Russell Jordan  
Norman Taylor

**Percussion:**

Tim Barry\*  
Peter Beament\*  
George Lawn\*

**Harp:**

Jeffrey Dyball

**Celeste:**

Stephen Bettany

\*guest artist

**THE BALCONY BRASS  
(Purcell)**

**Trumpets:**

Maurice Murphy  
Paul Benniston  
Paul Archibald  
Mike Laird

**Trombones:**

Simon Wills  
David Whitson  
David Chandler  
Keith McNicoll

**Horn:**

Roger Montgomery

**Tuba:**

Nick Hitchins

**THE BALCONY BRASS  
(Janacek)**

**SOUTH**

**Trumpets:**

Maurice Murphy  
Ray Simmons  
Julian Brewer  
Sarah Wilson  
Tony Rickard  
David Price  
Colin Clague  
Ross Brown  
John Young

**Bass Trumpets:**

Tom Winthorpe  
Leslie Lake

**Tenor Tubas:**

David Chandler  
Andy Faubert

**Tuba:**

Nick Hitchins

**CENTRAL**

**Trumpets:**

Ian Balmain  
Ted Hobart  
Cameron Todd  
Ryan Matthews  
Clare Helsdon  
Heidi Sutcliffe  
Dan Conneally

**NORTH**

**Trumpets:**

William Houghton  
James Watson  
Paul Benniston  
Alistair Mackie  
Mike Laird  
John Hutchins  
Simon Sturgeon-Clegg  
Robin Smith  
Will Smith

**Bass Trumpets:**

Simon Wills  
Roger Brenner

**Tenor Tubas:**

John Edney  
Aidan Chamberlain

**Tuba:**

John Elliott

**REAR SOLO TUBA:**

Kevin Morgan

**EXTRA JANACEK TIMPANISTS:**

**NORTH SIDE**

Michael Baker  
William Lockhart  
David Searcy  
David Stirling  
Stephen Webberley

**SOUTH SIDE**

Simon Carrington  
Gary Kettel  
Stephen Henderson  
Simon Archer  
Geoffrey Prentice  
Anne Collis  
Charles Fullbrook

*Special thanks to all those "unseen hands" :*

**ROH ORCHESTRA OPERATIONS**

Stephen Wadey  
Don Fuller  
Nick Fuller

**EXTRA TIMPANI**

provided by Simon Archer

**EVEN MORE TIMPANI**

provided by Charles Fullbrook

**YET MORE TIMPANI**

and some other bits  
provided by Stephen Henderson

**CONCERT HELPERS**

Andy Barclay  
Matt Dickinson  
Kevin Early  
Chris Guy  
Richard Horne  
Gillian McDonagh  
Alex Neal  
Nick Ormrod  
Martin Owens  
Matt Rich  
Chris Terian

**ROH ORCHESTRA OFFICE**

Hazel Province  
Yvonne Lang

**ROH MUSIC LIBRARY**

Gina Boaks  
Hazel Cropper  
Tony Rickard

**FRONT-OF-HOUSE**

Farès Moussa  
Eileen Restall  
& the FOH teams

**TICKETING**

Barney Warrington

**ROH SOUND DEPARTMENT**

Eric Pressley  
Ruth Perry  
Michael Disandolo



**VIDEO CAMERAMEN**

Giles Harrison  
Jeff Carrigan  
Michael Doran

**PROBABLY THE BEST FANFARE IN THE WORLD**

Leos Janáček

**HELP ALONG THE WAY**

Lady Joan Downes  
Michael Skinner  
John Harrison  
Tisi Dutton  
Paul Cosh  
Bob Farley  
Simon Catchpole  
Simon Gunton  
Drew Brooke-Mellor

Jimmy Ryan (The Coach & Horses)

The Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall

**CO-ORDINATED & PRESENTED**

by Nigel Bates

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More about the music that was played:

**Henry Purcell (arr. Crees) : Prelude to The Fairy Queen**

**The “Balcony Brass” conducted by Eric Crees**

This music opened the Royal Opera's first ever season at the Royal Opera House in 1947. The opening timpani solo was played by Russell Jordan, who took over Alan's Principal Timpani position. Before he came to the ROH, Alan was with the London Symphony Orchestra, and ROH Principal Trombone Eric Crees was our newest LSO recruit at the time of the concert.

**William Walton : Two string pieces from Henry V**

**The Strings of the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House**

**led by Vasko Vassilev conducted by Elgar Howarth**

Alan was also involved for more than forty years with both the Brighton Philharmonic and Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestras. His last ever engagement was at Tunbridge Wells in April 2002, when the suite from Henry V was performed. Elgar Howarth was a member of the ROH Orchestra trumpet section for several years, and held Alan in particularly high regard.

**Walter Gissrau : The Bicycle Galop**

**Nigel Bates, Michael Doran, Stephen Henderson & Gary Kettel,  
xylophones**

**The Orchestra of the Royal Opera House**

**conducted by Barry Wordsworth**

Amongst Alan's effects was a good deal of music, but also (suprisingly) a complete set of score and parts of this novelty item! The young Alan was an enthusiastic cyclist, and it rather seemed as if we were being told something in finding this music. Fellow Savage Club members Michael Doran and Stephen Henderson joined ROH principal percussion Nigel Bates and Alan's famous "get your haircut" pupil Gary Kettel.

**Donald Cashmore (arr. Farnon) : Drink to me Only**

**Alasdair Malloy, wine glasses**

**The Orchestra of the Royal Opera House**

**conducted by Barry Wordsworth**

It was no secret that Alan enjoyed a drop of the fine stuff ! Alasdair Malloy is principal percussion of the BBC Concert Orchestra, and Barry Wordsworth was formerly Music Director of the Royal Ballet, and current Music Director of the Brighton Philharmonic, where Alan played for decades.

**Richard Wagner (arr. Sonntag) : The Nibelungen March**

**The Wind Band of the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House**

**conducted by Sir Edward Downes**

"A Poet of the Timpani" was one description of Alan's rendition of the timpani solos in Wagner operas, especially the Ring Cycle. Herr Sonntag kindly marches us through the Ring in three and one-half minutes, conducted by veteran Royal Opera principal conductor Sir Edward Downes who himself celebrated Fifty Years at Covent Garden in 2002-2003.

**Richard Strauss : Morgen**

**Amanda Roocroft, soprano    Vasko Vassilev, solo violin**

**The Orchestra of the Royal Opera House,**

**conducted by Antonio Pappano**

Again, Alan's performance of the difficult timpani parts in Strauss operas was the stuff of legend, and this beautiful Strauss song is our tribute to that beautiful musicianship. Miss Amanda Roocroft played the role of Eva at the performance of Die Meistersinger that was dedicated to Alan's lasting memory. Representing the long line of Music Directors that Alan served (dating back to Karl Rankl) we were delighted to welcome our newest music director, Antonio Pappano to conduct.

### **2001 : A Timpanic Odyssey**

**A short film celebrating Alan's 50 years  
at the Royal Opera House**

Music included :

Also Sprach Zarathustra (Chicago Symphony / Georg Solti)

Fings ain't what they used to be (Oscar Brandenburg Orchestra)

Damnation of Faust - March (London Symphony Orchestra / Colin Davis)

Siegfried's Funeral March (ROH Orchestra / Bernard Haitink)

Rosenkavalier Waltz (ROH Orchestra / Georg Solti)

Petrouchka - Dance of the Coachmen

(London Symphony Orchestra / Claudio Abbado)

La Fille Mal Gardee (ROH Orchestra / John Lanchbery)

Rigoletto (ROH Orchestra / Edward Downes)

### **Leos Janáček : Closing Fanfare from Sinfonietta**

The Orchestra of the Royal Opera House

The massed "Balcony Brass"

The massed Timpani

conducted by Elgar Howarth

Another score that we found in Alan's effects was that of the Janacek Sinfonietta, which Alan never ever played, as far as we know. He loved the piece, and this expanded version nearly raised the roof of the Vilar Floral Hall. A quote from John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress seems particularly apt : "So he passed over, and the Trumpets sounded for him on the other side". Alan slipped away without a fanfare of trumpets, and we like to think that he would have heard this "big finish" to his concert, featuring brass and timpani players from every London orchestra, every London music college, and La Scala Milan.

