

Conductor has a busy life

By IFAN PAYNE
Music Critic

He comes from the land of song and his whole world seems to revolve around his love of music.

Warm—humored and quick featured, South Wales native Clifford Bunford is here to lead the American Choral Institute for Gifted High School Children and he brings a lifetime of experience with vocal music to the task.

For the moment on a blistering hot day at KSU, he is as eager to talk of his work in Cardiff as he is of the coming week.

"We're going to do *Gerontius* next year."

He is speaking of his own university choir in Cardiff.

But they don't know Elgar here, do they?

Then he becomes agitated as he describes the choral work of another recent British composer, Gustav Holst.

"The chorus has performed the standard repertoire, Modern, Romantic, Stravinsky, Britten, Vaughan—Williams and Holst..."

Clearly he loves the music.

"Do you know his work?...It is so beautiful, but he is not known over here at all."

Clifford Bunford's immersion in music seems total. He not only is a choral conductor, but in sharp contrast to the situation at KSU, he conducts the university orchestra as well as a variety of choruses.

So what has the orchestra of the Music Department at the University College in Cardiff been playing, I ask?

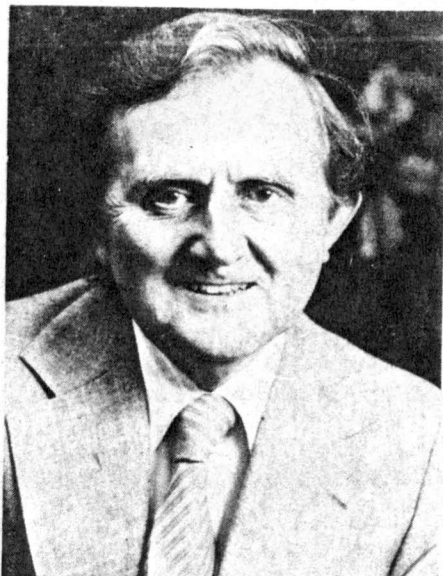
"Well, we've done all the standard repertoire, you know. All the Brahms Symphonies and Dvorak, Vaughan-Williams, Stravinsky, Copland, Delius...the standard repertoire. And also works by Lennox Berkeley, Hodinott, of course, Rawsthorn, David Wynne, Grace Williams..."

I let him draw breath, but now he's in full swing.

"We do all the big solo works."

Yes, but...who do they use as soloists?

"Oh, we have people on the staff."



AP Laserphoto

CLIFFORD BUNFORD
...great love of music

There's muttering about the Vaughan—Williams tuba concerto.

Then:

"And of course we use gifted students, and we also have international artists come in and play with us."

And the names of Peter Pears and the violinist Aaron Rosand come up.

And how many concerts does the orchestra give, I wonder?

"Well, we give three orchestral concerts with the choir every year, and two orchestra concerts a year, and then there are the informal concerts of course."

Informal?

"Well lunchtime and evening concerts..."

How often? I almost hesitate to ask.

"Oh, once a week. And then the chamber orchestra gives two concerts a year and then there's the opera...We're thinking of doing *Trouble in Tahiti* next year..."

By this point I have lost track.

Clifford Bunford conducts three choruses in addition to the orchestras and the list of operas that the department has produced is impressive in its adventurousness: *Dido and Aeneas*, *Der Jasager*, *Savatri*, *Idomeneo*... and all of these mounted

without the help of a speech or drama department. "So, it becomes very expensive for us: about \$3,000 an opera because we have to pay for people to come from outside."

The Music Department has now joined up with members of the Royal Opera at Covent Garden who take part in their student productions.

I do not remember the Music Department at Cardiff as being very large, and indeed, it turns out to have only 200 undergraduates.

"But, you see," continues Clifford Bunford, "we are very lucky in Cardiff with the amount of music that we have. There are four or five symphony orchestras — there's the Chamber Orchestra, the Bach Choir Orchestra, the Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Welsh Orchestra, the Sinfonia and of course there's one of the finest opera companies in Europe, the Welsh National Opera, and there is a contemporary opera group and two international music festivals..."

The list seems endless as we start discussing the regional music festivals as well.

Our discussion turns to his own singing experiences.

Professor Bunford sang for many years with the BBC Singers and the Welsh National Opera company.

"I was in the production in which Margaret Price made her debut as Cherubino. John Shirley Quirk was the Count in that production."

Did you sing with any other well known singers I asked.

Big mistake, as a list of names pours out: "There was Isobelle Baily, Helen Watts, Kathleen Ferrier..."

What was she like as a person, Kathleen Ferrier?

"Oh, wonderful person. She really looked after me when I was a young singer."

Those days are behind him now, and this week Clifford Bunford is here in the heart of the Flint Hills bringing his experience and Welsh *hwyl* to teaching youngsters how to sing.

For the moment, though, he grows wistful.

"I gave up singing...too soon maybe...but I'm not sorry. Singing is a diminishing asset."