

# Stephen Oliver Sixtieth Anniversary Year Newsletter

November, 2010

*This is the fourth of a series of emailed news updates for those interested or involved in celebrating what would have been Stephen's sixtieth birthday year.*

*Thank you for your continuing interest and support—please stay in touch*

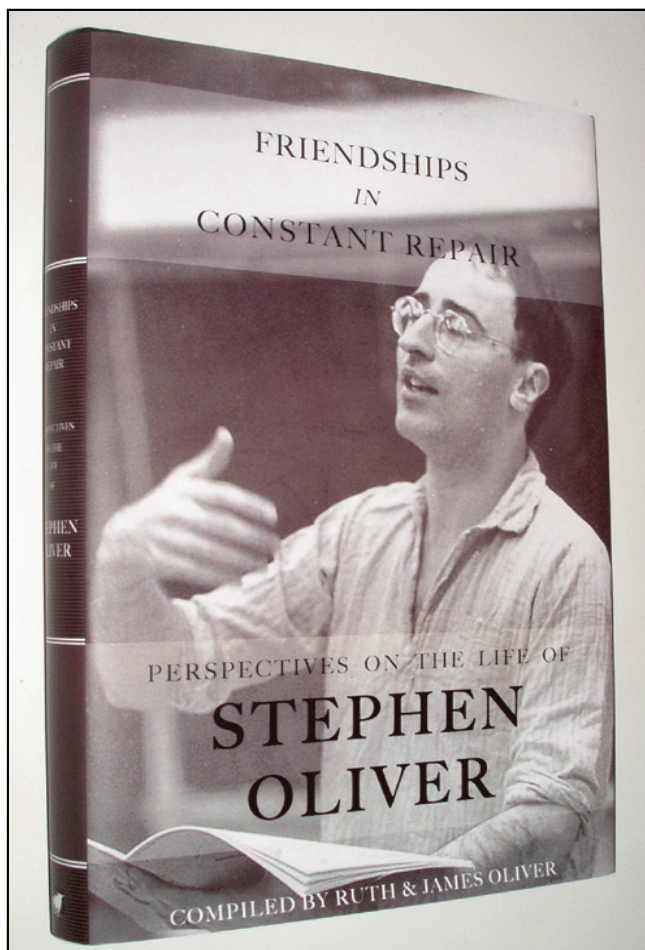
## “Friendships in Constant Repair”

**Over fifty people contributed to this book which was published on 1st September.** It has been very well received both within the UK and around the world with many readers writing to say how much they enjoyed it. It was ‘Editor’s Choice’ in the October edition of the Classical Music Magazine. Andrew Green wrote:

“Nearly two decades after his death and published to mark the 60th anniversary of his birth comes this variegated collection of writings in memory of the extraordinary Stephen Oliver. His output as a composer was staggering enough, most notably of course opera and musical theatre, but he was also a natural broadcaster, writer, lecturer and even actor, cramming his all-too-short life with contributions to the cultural body politic. And as the Samuel Johnson quotation in the book title is intended to indicate, Oliver took friendship and its responsibilities as seriously as anything else.

Friends indeed contribute much to this compilation, the devoted work of Oliver's brother and sister. The memories go back to early years, including his time as a St Paul's Cathedral chorister, when the already precocious early talent blossomed. We sample Oliver's own authentic voice talking about his life in conversation with Paul Griffiths and then German journalist Werner Bleisteiner, before moving on to a transcript of a legendary Radio 3 One Pair of Ears review of a week's broadcasting - deliciously written in rhyming couplets. Both this and the Bleisteiner interview also appear (along with examples of Oliver as witty songwriter/performer) on a bonus CD which adds greatly to the overall package.

Among the household names contributing memories are Tim Rice (on his collaboration with Oliver on the strangely underperformed musical *Blondel*), Simon Callow (musing on Oliver's gift for graceful bluntness), Graham Vick, Jonathan Dove and Jane Glover, whose close friendship with Oliver began at Oxford and flourished ever thereafter. There are contributions from Oliver's doctor and the nurse with him when he died of an Aids-related illness. His



ashes were scattered at Batignano, the medieval Tuscan hill village graced so often, as we read, by his operas. Finally comes a transcript of the 1992 celebration of Oliver's life at St Paul's Covent Garden, including his setting of the Horatian lines embracing the legendary motto *Carpe Diem*. I hope that the truly gigantic concluding list of works and the book as a whole will encourage an 'Oliver Revival'. He probably would have chortled at the thought."

### Other Reviews

Hilary Davan Wetton wrote an article about Stephen in *The Guardian* (4th November) highlighting the book and we understand there are to be reviews published in various journals including 'Opera' magazine and the *Times Literary Supplement*. Keep an eye on the 'news' section of the website for further information.

Do you know other people who would be interested in reading this book? Might it make a good Christmas gift for someone?

*If so, order copies via the website at the discounted rate of £15 (plus £3 p&p) and you will also be making a real contribution to support the work of young opera composers (over £1000 raised so far). The book is also available through booksellers at £20. ISBN 978-184876-534-4*



## Performances

The year has seen some notable performances of Stephen's music.

The first performance of the year was on 12th January at the Purcell Room on the South Bank. Clare Hammond played a piano piece originally written for Julian Jacobson called 'Study'. It was a dramatic performance greatly appreciated by the audience.

Then in March, the excellent Commotio Chamber Choir performed 'O Fons Amoris' in a concert at St Barnabas Church, Oxford. The surroundings for this haunting piece were wonderful and it fitted in well in a beautifully varied programme.

In mid April, the Minotaur Music Theatre did three excellent performances of 'A Man of Feeling' in a double bill with Rossini's 'L'occasione fa il ladro'.

### *'Stephen Oliver at 60' Concert*

On 9th May, many friends and colleagues gathered at the Playhouse in Norwich for a concert of Stephen's music. Peter Wilson gathered Cantabile, Jonathan Dove, the London Mozart Players, Nicholas Clebury, The Norfolk and Norwich Festival Chorus, a group from the Birmingham Opera Company and Simon Callow together for a memorable celebration of Stephen's music including two ensembles from 'Timon of Athens', three songs from the RSC's 'Tempest', four songs from 'Blondel' and 'Bilbo's last song' from 'Lord of the Rings'. The Birmingham Opera Company performed the opera 'A Man of Feeling' for two voices and piano and the second half was led by Simon Callow who narrated 'The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby' with many extracts from Stephen's wonderful music. In the Eastern Daily Press, Christopher Smith referred to the evening as an "Affectionate and entertaining tribute" and in the Evening Standard, Barry Millington thought it was all "excellent festival fare".

### *Other Opera Performances*

On 12th May, the Cork School of Music put on a production of the opera 'The Garden'. This dramatic piece for soprano, tenor, harpsichord and string quartet was warmly received by the audience of students, staff and friends. Soprano, Gemma Sugrue took on her role as part of her master's degree and she was ably supported by lecturer and tenor, Robert Craig.

On 11th September, there was a further performance of the Birmingham Opera Company's 'A Man of Feeling' as part of the Birmingham Arts Fest, at the Yardbird Jazz Club, Birmingham.

Also during the week beginning 6th September, the British Youth Opera presented two semi-staged performances of Stephen Oliver's adaptation of Peri's

opera 'Euridice' at the Peacock Theatre, London. With a universally strong cast of eighteen and a plain stage (with wonderful lighting effects), the audience experienced the Peri vocal lines of 1600 without alteration but with a freer and exciting approach to the orchestration. It was beautifully executed and provided a memorable occasion for everyone involved.

In the second week of October, the Minotaur Music Theatre included the ten minute opera 'The Waiter's Revenge' as part of an opera evening which also included 'Savitri' by Gustav Holst and 'Hin und Zuruck' by Paul Hindemith. This production took place at the Rosemary Branch Theatre in London. 'The Waiter's Revenge' was performed in the public bar downstairs to the astonishment and delight of those who happened to be there at the time! With performers entering the pub at various points, it was wonderful to speculate on whether they were part of the opera or simply people entering the pub! The three operas together made a perfect evening with confident and colourful performances from a talented young cast. Members of the cast also treated the audience to three delightful Kurt Weill songs. Also in October, the Jays Singers performed 'A Dialogue between Mary and her Child' at a concert held at Blofield Church, Norfolk.

Performances continue and one production we are aware of is at Reigate Grammar School where they are taking on 'Nicholas Nickleby' from 7th to 11th December, 2010.

*Please do keep us informed if/when you are performing Stephen's music*

## New Projects

Going into next year, there are two projects which we will be pursuing to promote Stephen's music.



1. **Working recordings:** Those interested in performing pieces sometimes ask if we have recordings so that they can understand a piece better. We have many of Stephen's original cassettes and tapes and we intend to digitalise these to assemble as many working recordings as we can to assist musical directors.
2. **Commercial recordings:** Many letters and emails received from readers of the book have asked how they can listen to more of Stephen's music. We intend to investigate possible new recordings—perhaps of Shakespeare songs, Choral pieces or even one of the operas.

*Please do contact us if you can help in these projects*

[www.stephenoliver.org](http://www.stephenoliver.org)

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