

Andrew Potter

1949 – 2016

Choral music in the UK is the poorer for the loss of Andrew Potter on 18 February. Through his work as head of music at Oxford University Press and as co-founder (with John Rutter) of the Association of British Choral Directors (*abcd*), Andrew became one of the key figures in the explosion of choral activity we have witnessed in this country since the 1980s.

Born in 1949, Andrew won a place as a chorister in Durham cathedral in 1956, and started a lifelong love of the city. After completing his schooling at Clifton College, Bristol, he returned to Durham to study Law, English and Music, being a prime mover in the University G&S Society, and singing in the Cathedral choir again, this time as a bass. In his final year, Andrew read in the newspaper that Lord Goodman – then chair of the Arts Council – had announced the intention to build a new opera house in Manchester. Andrew wrote to Goodman asking if he could come and help. The building did not go ahead, but Goodman advised Andrew to enrol for a new arts administration course in London.

Positions at the London Symphony Orchestra, Glyndebourne, Oxford University Press and the National Federation of Music Societies followed, then three years as assistant director at Wexford Arts Festival in Ireland, before Andrew returned in 1979 to the UK and to OUP as its head of music – a position he held until 2004, when he retired from both OUP and as chair of the Music Publishers Association. OUP colleague Simon Wright remembers: 'In 1985 Andrew succeeded Christopher Morris as head of music publishing, having organised the relocation of OUP's music department from London to the company's main offices in Oxford in the previous year. Andrew's immediate imperative was to modernise both the list and the operation, and to bring focus to those things that he instinctively knew were essential to a classical music publisher's growth (and even survival): financial strin-

gency, strong relationships, an embracing of technology, keen artistic judgement, and an enjoyable scattering of risk. Andrew signed up a range of young composers, while always ensuring relationships with OUP's existing writers and composer estates were set fair for the future. He supported early attempts at computerised music engraving software and data management programs, and he recognised the need for music publishers to seek their businesses (and thus their income) within an increasingly diffuse and ever-changing digital environment. World travel was second nature to him, but somehow he always came home having found a new composer here, business partners and agents there, and performers for the Press's music everywhere. He stepped down in 2004 while at the top of his game as a publisher, but in retirement continued to serve the industry, most recently working again for OUP as a consultant. Andrew enjoyed negotiation, and driving a hard bargain, but his humanity and sense of fairness inevitably won the day: it is as a bringer together of people that his colleagues at OUP will best remember him.'

A career in the music industry gave Andrew an invaluable perspective on how things should be run (experience that he passed on after retirement through teaching at Buckinghamshire New University. As chair of the Performing Rights Society, he steered that organisation through one of its rockiest periods – when the classical subsidy was attacked by the majority of members and abolished – and ensured that composers who earned little from their royalties would have the chance to apply for grants from the PRS Foundation which was set up, very much Andrew's idea. After retirement from OUP he continued his support of the creative community by chairing the Design and Artists Copyright Society that campaigned for artists' rights when the UK implemented the resale right. He was also a director of the Copyright Licensing Agency, and these three roles demonstrate his utmost commitment to artistic creators.



Then, of course, there would be no Association of British Choral Directors without Andrew Potter. It was only through his vision and commitment to the establishment of an association for choral directors in the UK that *abcd* was founded in 1986. Andrew led the Association forward following a major restructuring in 2001 that strengthened its corporate governance. Even after relinquishing the chairmanship for the second time, Andrew was always present – at trustees and council meetings, at conventions, at events – offering wise words, encouraging others, keeping a critical eye on how things were done and, crucially, how the finances were.

Andrew's family remember him as 'the impresario' and it is perhaps an entirely appropriate description of someone who 'made music happen'. In the latter stages of his life he ran the Sussex Gruffs Male Voice Choir, enjoying the challenge of developing mature voices from growling to relative purity and giving them the confidence to perform! Amid the unfailing modesty that concealed considerable achievements during his lifetime – who, for instance, in the music community knew he was chair of the London Arts in Health Forum? – Andrew was always positive, good-humoured and a tremendous support to others. Our sadness at his death must be tempered by the privilege of knowing such a remarkable man.

With thanks to Simon Wright and Andrew's brother, Jim, for their contributions to this tribute.

Leslie East