

= Stuart Wilson =

Sir James Steuart Wilson ( 21 July 1889 ? 18 December 1966 ) was an English singer , known for tenor roles in oratorios and concerts in the first half of the 20th century . After the Second World War he was an administrator for several organisations including the Arts Council of Great Britain , the BBC and the Royal Opera House .

Following service in the First World War , Wilson became known for singing tenor roles in oratorios by composers from Bach to Elgar , and was particularly admired both as the Evangelist in Bach 's St Matthew Passion and in the title role of The Dream of Gerontius . He was a champion of music by English composers of his generation , notably Ralph Vaughan Williams , Gustav Holst and Rutland Boughton . He also appeared from time to time in operatic tenor roles , including Satyavan in the first professional performance of Holst 's Savitri . The quality of his voice and even his technique , though , was not universally admired . In a high @-@ profile libel case Wilson sued a member of the public who had criticised one of his performances in a letter , and the BBC for publishing it : he won £ 2 @,@ 000 in damages .

In 1937 Wilson settled for a while in the United States , teaching at the Curtis Institute of Music . He retired from singing and returned to the United Kingdom in 1942 where he began a second career as an administrator . He initially worked for the BBC , then after the war was appointed music director of the newly created Arts Council of Great Britain ; in 1948 he was knighted for his services in that post . That same year he became the BBC 's director of music , and infamously engineered the enforced retirement of the BBC Symphony Orchestra 's chief conductor , Adrian Boult . The following year he became deputy general administrator of the Royal Opera House , in which post he secured the premiere staging of Vaughan Williams 's The Pilgrim 's Progress in 1951 . Unhappy with being subordinate to the Royal Opera 's general administrator , David Webster , Wilson resigned from his post in June 1955 and started a campaign against homosexuals in the musical profession . Wilson ended his career as principal of the Birmingham School of Music , 1957 ? 1960 .

= = Life and career = =

= = = Early years = = =

Wilson was born in Bristol , the youngest child of the Rev. James Maurice Wilson , headmaster of Clifton College who was once described as " something of a theological firebrand " . Steuart 's elder brother was Arnold Talbot Wilson , later the colonial administrator of Mesopotamia . Wilson was educated at Winchester College and King 's College , Cambridge , where he read classics but developed a strong interest in music . During that time he formed friendships with Clive Carey , Edward J. Dent and Ralph Vaughan Williams . Wilson 's first public appearance as a singer was in Vaughan Williams 's incidental music for Aristophanes ' The Wasps in 1909 , and he made his first appearance in opera as Tamino in Mozart 's The Magic Flute in 1911 .

At the outbreak of the First World War Wilson volunteered for service and was commissioned in the army . He served in France and was twice wounded , then worked in the Intelligence Bureau of the General Staff at the War Office and General Headquarters in France . Authorities differ on whether the wounds , which resulted in the loss of a lung and a kidney , affected his singing voice . The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography states that they did not ; Frank Howes , writing in 1951 , and The Times in its obituary , both state that they did .

= = = Singing career = = =

After the war , Wilson developed an interest in early English music and was instrumental in founding the London @-@ based sextet , the English Singers , in 1920 . The following year he sang the role of Satyavan in the first professional performance of Gustav Holst 's Savitri , at the Lyric Theatre , Hammersmith .

In 1921 Wilson met A. H. Fox Strangways , editor of the newly founded journal Music and Letters ; they discovered a shared interest in making practical translations of Lieder texts , Wilson having only recently encountered Schubert Lieder , and collaborated on and published volumes of Schubert , Schumann and Brahms translated into English . Wilson later made an English translation of the texts set in Mahler 's Das Lied von der Erde

From 1921 to 1923 Wilson taught music at Bedales School , an appointment that left him time to take singing engagements all over the United Kingdom . In 1924 he left the English Singers and furthered his singing studies abroad , first in Nice with Jean de Reszke ( 1924 ? 25 ) , with whom he learned the roles of Otello , Parsifal and Tristan ; he then took lessons with Sir George Henschel ( 1925 ? 28 ) , and studied 17th- and 18th @-@ century music with Wanda Landowska in Paris .

For a while Wilson sang with the Bristol Opera Company , which toured in London to perform at the Royal Court Theatre in 1927 and 1928 , conducted by Adrian Boult and Malcolm Sargent . Productions mounted included Ralph Vaughan Williams 's The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains , and Charles Villiers Stanford 's The Travelling Companion .

Wilson became a leading interpreter of the Evangelist in JS Bach 's Passions , and of the title part in Edward Elgar 's The Dream of Gerontius , which he sang under the baton of the composer and other conductors including Hamilton Harty , Malcolm Sargent , Albert Coates , and Adrian Boult . The Times called him " the best exponent of [ Gerontius ] at the present time " . The tenor Peter Pears said that it was hearing Wilson singing as Evangelist in Bach 's St Matthew Passion that " started me off " .

Mozart remained part of Wilson 's repertoire at the Old Vic ( though Howard Ferguson complained " Steuart Wilson would sing out of tune " ) , and he regularly championed English music , making regular appearances at Rutland Boughton 's festival in Glastonbury and on occasion at Napier Miles 's festivals in Bristol . He was praised by Holst , who credited him with rescuing the British National Opera Company production which had previously " ruined " his opera At the Boar 's Head .

Writing in 1968 , The Gramophone critic Roger Fiske recalled that Wilson " stood out above other tenors both for high intelligence and for clarity of words , though his voice was not by nature of especial beauty ; also he never sang quite as well in performance as at rehearsal , his tone tightening under stress . " Frank Howes made similar observations in an article published in 1951 , though noting that " intelligence " was a recognised euphemism for " indifferent vocal equipment " . A more recent judgement , based on recordings of Schubert Lieder , describes " Wilson 's stentorian and rather stiff delivery ? the fast vibrato , his tendency to rush ( slower songs sound better ) and the impression that he is distinctly overparted in the higher register " , all of which " does not make for a satisfactory performance according to today 's standards . "

For many years , Adrian Boult had been a close friend of Wilson and his first wife Ann , née Bowles . When , in the late 1920s , Wilson began to mistreat his wife , Boult took her side . She divorced Wilson on grounds of cruelty in 1931 , and married Boult two years later . The enmity provoked in Wilson was to have lasting repercussions . The stigma attached to divorce in Britain in the 1930s affected Wilson 's career : he was barred from performing in English cathedrals at the Three Choirs Festival for 25 years until 1957 , when he narrated Honegger 's King David in Worcester , by which time his singing career had ended .

= = = BBC libel case = = =

Wilson achieved a wider fame for his successful libel action against the BBC in what became known as " the case of the intrusive H " . In 1933 , the BBC had printed in the 14 April edition of its magazine The Radio Times a letter from a retired schoolmaster who , having heard a broadcast of the St Matthew Passion , accused Wilson of the technical fault of aspirating his runs in decorated music : " I am amazed that the BBC could engage anyone quite so incompetent in his breath control . ? ' Pilate 's wife ' became ' Pigh @-@ highlet 's wigh @-@ highf ' ; ' High Priest ' was turned into ' High @-@ high Pree @-@ heest ' ; ' Purple robe ' into ' Purple ro @-@ hobe ' ; ' to ' into ' too @-@ hoo ' , and so on throughout the entire performance . It was simply ghastly . " When Wilson complained , the BBC initially offered to publish an apology in The Radio Times , but then took

exception when Wilson demanded £ 5 @, @ 000 in damages .

Wilson sued the BBC . The corporation vigorously defended its action on the grounds that the letter was justified criticism of a performer . Wilson questioned the letter writer 's competence to pass judgement on his performance : while Wilson conceded that he used the " intrusive H " , as a legitimate ornament which his teacher , Jean de Reszke , inserted into several works , and admitted that he had used it at two points in his broadcast performance , neither of these occurrences had been pointed out in the letter . Furthermore , two of the letter 's cited examples , " Pilate 's Wife " and " purple robe " , did not appear in his part of the work at all . During the three @-@ day court case several expert witnesses were called , including Clive Carey who brought as evidence a score annotated by de Reszke . The judge , Lord Hewart , urged the jury to be " extremely liberal " : after 45 minutes deliberation , the jury decided against the BBC and the letter writer , and awarded Wilson £ 2 @, @ 000 damages . The BBC chose not to appeal and shouldered the entire cost : in an internal memo the BBC Director General , John Reith , observed that in such cases a British jury would tend to favour the individual , rather than a corporation , and that to appeal might appear an unjustified use of the BBC 's monetary power .

Wilson used the money he won in the libel case to support a London production of Boughton 's opera The Lily Maid , which he himself conducted at the Winter Garden Theatre in January 1937 . He was praised for his assured beat and experienced direction .

= = = USA = = =

In 1937 Wilson settled for a time in the United States with his second wife , Mary ( who was a cellist ) , and joined the faculty at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia ; there he taught singing , English diction , vocal repertoire , and vocal ensemble . He continued to give recitals into the early 1940s . In 1941 he resigned from the Curtis Institute in protest against the dismissal of the director Randall Thompson , and the following year the Wilsons returned to England . This was the end of Wilson 's career as a singer , he himself observing , " The whole place [ America ] is jammed full of singers from every country in the world , all rampaging around for jobs . "

= = = Musical administrator = = =

Wilson joined the BBC in 1942 " in a minor capacity with hopes of preferment " . The following year he was appointed music director for the BBC Overseas Service . After the war he was appointed music director of the Arts Council of Great Britain , newly formed from the wartime Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts ( CEMA ) , and he helped reorganise the music department for peacetime work . In that post , he gave support to Benjamin Britten 's English Opera Group in the first year of its existence , recommending to the Council that the group should " be awarded a grant of not less than £ 3000 and closer to £ 5000 " . He subsequently accepted an invitation to give a lecture at the first Aldeburgh Festival , speaking on 10 June 1948 on " The Future of Music in England " .

In April 1948 , the year in which he was knighted for his services as director of the Arts Council , he became the BBC 's director of music following the sudden death of Victor Hely @-@ Hutchinson . The Times described this appointment as " not a success " , and it is chiefly remembered for the controversy Wilson provoked by engineering the forced retirement of Boult as chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra . In the 1930s Boult had been promised informally by the Corporation 's then director @-@ general , John Reith , that he would be exempt from the BBC 's rule that staff retire at age 60 . However , Reith left the BBC in 1938 and his promise carried no weight with his successors . Wilson , on being appointed director of music , made clear to the BBC 's director @-@ general , William Haley , that he intended to have Boult replaced as chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra , and used his authority to insist on Boult 's enforced retirement . Haley was unaware of Wilson 's personal animus against Boult and later acknowledged , in a broadcast tribute to Boult , that he " had listened to ill @-@ judged advice in retiring him . "

In 1949 Wilson , aged 60 , moved to Covent Garden to take the post of deputy general

administrator of the Royal Opera House . While in that position he gave support to the Polish composer Andrzej Panufnik , who had recently defected from communist Poland , by introducing him to the concert agent Harold Holt . Wilson was responsible for securing the premiere of Vaughan Williams 's The Pilgrim 's Progress at the Royal Opera House in 1951 . Wilson resented being subordinate to the general administrator , David Webster , and he resigned from his Royal Opera House post in June 1955 . The following month it was announced that he was launching " a campaign against homosexuality in British music " and was quoted as saying : " The influence of perverts in the world of music has grown beyond all measure . If it is not curbed soon , Covent Garden and other precious musical heritages could suffer irreparable harm . "

Wilson 's last major appointment was as principal of the Birmingham School of Music , 1957 ? 1960 , but this is described by Grove as " an unhappy episode " . The Gramophone critic Roger Fiske commented that Wilson " ' administered ' with an aggressive sensitivity and wit that veered between the inspired and the impossible " .

He was an enthusiastic member of the Tolhurst Society which existed in Oxford in the 1960s and 70s . At performances of the oratorio " Ruth " he would sing ( an octave down ) the Alto aria " I went out full , and the Lord hath sent me home again empty " . His characterization of the word " empty " is remembered by all who heard him .

Wilson died in 1966 in Petersfield , Hampshire , aged 77 .

= = Recordings = =

On a recording made in 1927 during a performance at the Royal Albert Hall , London , Wilson sings in extracts from The Dream of Gerontius conducted by the composer . He also recorded Vaughan Williams 's On Wenlock Edge , and songs by Denis Browne .