

In Memory of Peter Dempsey B.A (hons)

Peter Samuels

Peter Dempsey was born on 17th March 1953 but he sadly died "all too young" on 27th August 2012, and I feel that his contributions to music need recognition in a wider sense. An internationally recognised genius of the "archive music world", he was a music/record collector (mainly of 78s), archivist, tenor and writer; whilst he was responsible for hundreds of CDs (and earlier tapes) produced from original recordings.

He was also an accomplished performer (tenor) in his own right, as can be heard on many CDs often with accompanist



Peter Dempsey (c 1973) during his time as a language undergraduate at Birmingham University and scholar at La Sacal Milan.



Pete Dempsey (left) with his accompanist Guy Rowlands on the front cover of one of their CDs.

Guy Rowland, and he appeared on many TV and radio programmes both here and in Ireland.

Known as Jack to his friends, Peter's early love was opera, especially Italian. During his studies at Moseley Grammar School, while most of us were singing the likes of Dylan, The Stones, T Rex, he would be regaling us with arias from any number of operas.

Whilst an undergraduate linguist at Birmingham University, as part of his course he spent time in Italy during the early seventies and was invited to perform an extensive

repertoire of vocal music from opera and oratorios in recitals during his residence there. Through his love of what might be termed "archive" music he became a world authority on the early years of recorded music.

Peter's record collection numbered tens of thousands, from early "shellac" recordings of Caruso to Gigli or John McCormack to Paul Robeson, or from Max Miller to Jimmy Durante (two of his personal comedy favourites, along with Benny Hill!) His rare vinyl collection (over a hundred thousand he estimated) has

now been distributed to other collections throughout the country.

His CDs include "Love's Garden of Roses" (Mediart Music Group MDMCD 005) "Roses all The Way" (Songs by Eric Coates), "The Heart Awakening" (Tribute to Albert Katelbey), and "Queen of the Earth" (Great Victorian Songs and Piano Music) amongst many others.

Pete also appeared annually at the Eric Coates Anniversary meetings (on whom he was an authority) both at Selsey and Nottingham University, where the naming of a music room in honour of Peter was considered. Classic music programmes such as Radio 3, Radio 2 and Classic FM would certainly have used his material on many occasions.

His encyclopaedic knowledge of recordings and their performers is evident by the incredible detail of "sleeve notes" on the thousands of CDs for which he has provided the

original recordings. Indeed he is often quoted "verbatim" by radio music presenters, which always resulted in a wry smile from Peter! He performed on radio himself during the 1990s.

Pete was an exceptional tenor and worked with several opera companies across the country, as well as performances from an extensive solo repertoire. One of the highlights was his performances with the locally acclaimed Three English Tenors. His specialism became ballads, especially Victorian, and he released several CDs as a solo performer.

He was a sought after speaker, recently to commemorate the composer Albert Ketelbey (another Brummie), and regularly for the Eric Coates Society.

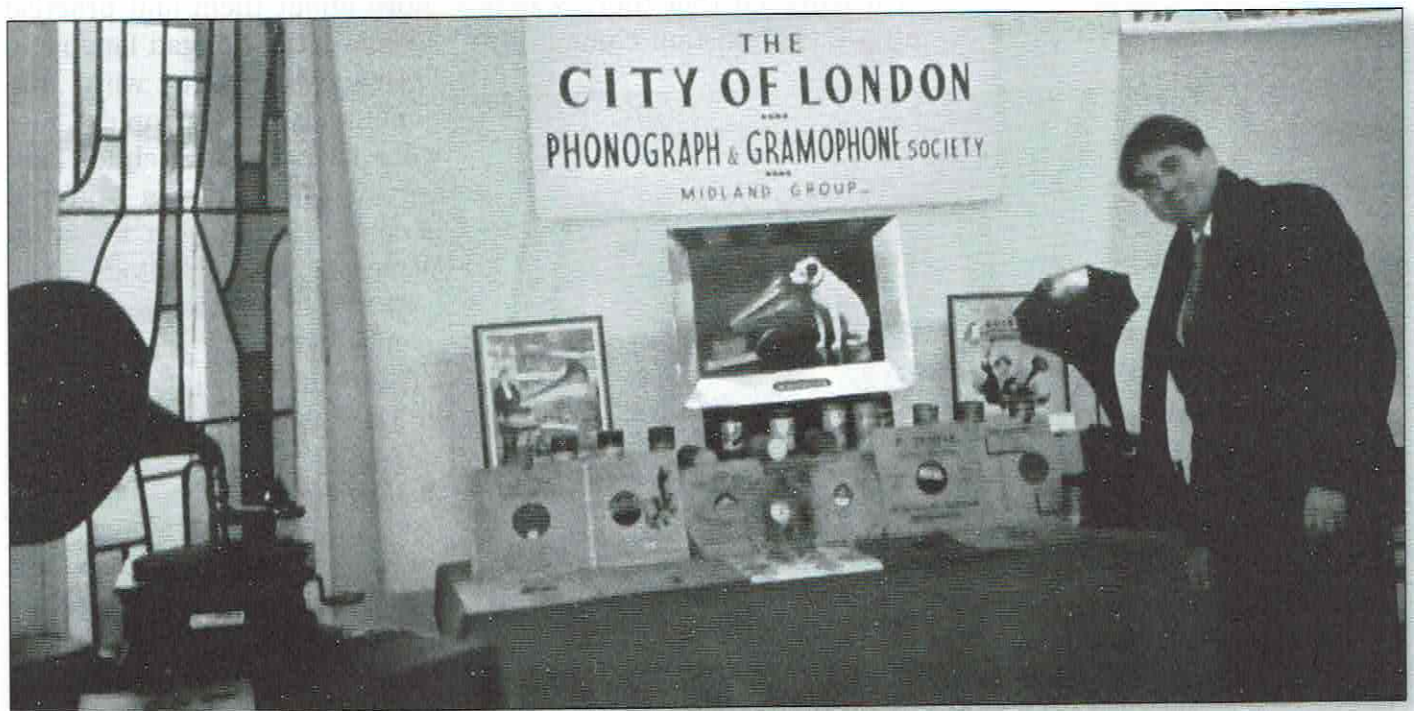
His wish was not fame or celebrity but an earnest desire to expose or introduce more people to the music, poetry, literature and performers he loved and which he saw as being ignored almost to the



Peter about to perform as one of The Three English Tenors in about 2002.

point of extinction by current cultural trends. To this end and at great personal sacrifice he was still striving when he was taken from us with so much still to achieve.

Pete was never happier than when listening to music with like-minded friends, a pint or two of good beer, cheese and bread adding to the conviviality, finishing off with Pete's own rendition of Londonderry Air (Danny Boy), never bettered in my opinion.



Peter at an archive record fair in about 2010.