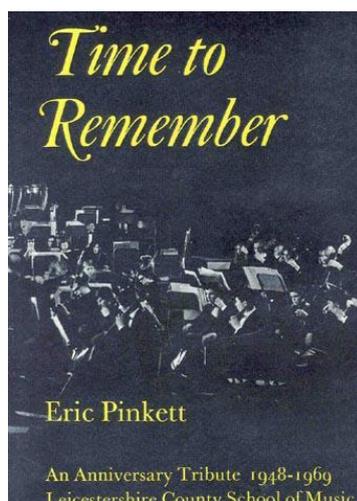


TIME TO REMEMBER



Eric Pinkett's book, written as a 21st Anniversary tribute in 1969, is out of print but it can now be read [on line](#) or [downloaded](#)

Eric Pinkett and the Leicestershire County School of Music An appreciation

Eric Pinkett, once the lone, self-styled wandering minstrel of Leicestershire and now assured of a prominent and permanent place among the world's pioneers of music education retired from his post as the county's first Music Adviser in 1976. It was a job he had done ceaselessly and enormously well for 28 years. *Progress by misadventure* was his own colourful summing up of his distinguished career - an allusion to the odd quirks of fate which often helped to choose his path forward right from the very beginning when he moved to Leicestershire in the first place. His energy, stamina and resourcefulness were legendary. Born in Nottinghamshire he went on to study violin at London's Royal Academy of Music. There are, of course, many people who know of his work as founder of the Leicestershire County School of Music and conductor of the Leicestershire Schools Symphony Orchestra. Very few are also aware of his ability as an artist ("My painting had a bit of influence on my appointment as Music Adviser" in Eric's own words) or the success he had as a dog breeder and international judge. In his early years in Leicestershire he was better known on the Continent as a judge of terriers than he was as a musician. That would change dramatically in the late 1960s as his own creation, the LSSO, took its place in the top rank of international youth orchestras.

Eric Pinkett's interest and enthusiasm for music education began in a Nottinghamshire school before the Second World War. By the time he was called up to the forces he had established a school orchestra there good enough to win for three years in succession the top award at an annual competition held at the old Queen's Hall in London. The Royal Air Force's original intention was that Eric would teach radio location but as it happened he soon gravitated to Cranwell and, hence- forward, spent most of his six years as an airman conducting R.A.F. bands. He probably did not realise it at the time but this experience was invaluable for his future in music education in that it enabled him to expand his knowledge of instruments. When he re-entered civilian life he was the perfect one-man peripatetic teacher of the complete orchestral line up of strings, woodwind, brass and percussion.

Returning to his Nottinghamshire school after the war was over he then successfully applied for the job of music master at Melton Mowbray Grammar School in Leicestershire. The head teacher at Melton was very interested in sport and was rather impressed with Eric's games record, which was discussed during the job interview. For the two years he was in post at Melton, Eric was to devote at least half of his time to sports tuition. Sport and music lived very happily alongside each other. Indeed, as a teenager in the late 1960s I still recall Eric giving us all the run around when we had a game of football during LSSO rehearsal breaks. It was just the same when we attempted to play cricket. He was a very able, natural sportsman and also a keen follower of Nottingham Forest football club. Most LSSO players were supporters of Leicester City but we forgave Eric for his sins.

In November 1947, Melton Mowbray Grammar School received a visit from the newly-appointed Director of Education for Leicestershire, Stewart Mason, an art connoisseur as well as an educationalist. Pinkett canvasses hanging on the classroom walls of Melton Mowbray Grammar School made an impact on the young Director and E.P. (the initials soon became the virtually exclusive mode of identification) maintained that those paintings smoothed the way to the County Offices in Grey Friars where, in April 1948, he presented himself as the Adviser for Music. So much for fate - he became a music teacher because he could play games and was appointed as Music Adviser for Leicestershire because he could paint. His relocation from Nottinghamshire to Leicestershire was certainly Leicestershire's gain.

Advisers, particularly in specialist subjects, were an immediate post-war development in education. New and unskilled teachers were being rapidly enlisted from all walks of life and the Training Colleges were turning out students, often with only one year's training. Thus there was an urgent need for help and advice in almost every school. The majority of schools music immediately after the war was choral work. Singing lessons were the norm. Eric stayed away from any involvement with choral work and instead decided to plough his own furrow by concentrating his efforts on developing instrumental tuition. At the time there was no precedent for the job, there was no advice to the adviser on how to set about it. So, having found himself a table, a chair and some office space, he quickly formulated the corner-cutting, enterprising, risk-taking and frequently audacious methods that characterised his working style for the best part of 30 years. Eric Pinkett assembled around him a group of dedicated, professional, enthusiastic people who harnessed the hidden musical talent in school children and then set the County ablaze. If he had not been a superman the whole affair could well have been bogged down in mediocrity. In the early days he was a man in a hurry, impatient for results and quite unwilling to fetter his ankles with red tape. He became the bane of the "treasury boys" because of his habit of short-circuiting the usual channels. Musical instruments, desperately needed, could often be obtained cheaply at the right place, at the right time and with ready money. E.P. snapped up bargains with his own money but the official feathers flew when he presented the receipts and requests for reimbursement. Some head teachers, too, were beginning to resent the affect this musical gadfly was having on their orthodox calm and there was a time when it seemed that his only friends were the children. Yet, on one historic May Saturday morning in 1948 at Elbow Lane School in Leicester, there began a weekly routine of orchestral rehearsals that has continued unbroken ever since. Why Elbow Lane? This was the nearest school to the bus station and all the members of the orchestra, from the four corners of the county, were required to make their own way from home to Elbow Lane and then back again. Could that possibly happen in today's modern world? I doubt it. Quantity rather than quality was the first necessity, but quantity is so much easier to achieve than quality and to this problem there was no quick solution. Achieving

quality takes time. Parents regularly called in and smiled indulgently at the orchestra's efforts, schoolmasters looked in and some offered advice.

In the early pioneering days E.P. had only his faith to keep him going. He was once advised to rehearse for five years before giving a concert and he ignored it. He knew that the children's interest would have evaporated without the stimulus of playing in public. Yet he was well aware of the sort of noise they made and staged their first outings in village halls, well away from large centres. The theory was that audiences there would be tolerant enough or inexpert enough not to complain. As the playing improved, so E.P. edged his way towards more densely populated areas in the county and eventually to the county's principal concert hall - the De Montfort Hall in Leicester.

Student numbers gradually increased and Elbow Lane became too small to accommodate the children. The solution was to relocate the School of Music to a campus of two adjoining schools in Birstall, on the outskirts of Leicester. These schools, Stonehill and Longslade, became the new home base for Saturday morning rehearsals and by the early 1960s three symphony orchestras were up and running - the Junior Orchestra the Intermediate Orchestra and the LSSO. This was a solid base on which to build and the standard of excellence that was being achieved was also noticed by musicians up and down the country. Saturday morning rehearsals were only part of the story. Throughout the school week, Eric and his peripatetic team would visit the key secondary schools in the major towns in the county such as Loughborough, Hinckley, Melton Mowbray and Ashby de la Zouch. Here, individual tuition and group ensemble work took place - not to mention talent spotting - and the young people honed their skills further. The students were also stimulated and motivated to continue attending rehearsals by being offered regular trips away from home. The Intermediates spent a week in a holiday resort every July, sleeping on camp beds in a local school and rehearsing every day. It was quite exciting travelling to those exotic seaside resorts - Colwyn Bay, Filey and Lowestoft. Being away from home without your parents at the age of 11 was an adventure. The LSSO made (and still makes) annual visits to Europe, a tradition that started with a trip to Essen in 1953.

My own childhood was spent in Hinckley and I first came into contact with Eric during primary school. I started violin lessons at the ripe old age of 8 and then two years later began attending the weekly County School of Music rehearsals held in Birstall every Saturday morning. The LSSO feeder groups gave its young members some "real" music to play. Nothing was dumbed down and I remember scraping my way through *Pique Dame*, Beethoven's *Pastoral*, Schubert's *Unfinished* and pot boilers such as the *Karelia Suite*, *Finlandia* and Malcolm Arnold's *Scottish Dances*. It must have sounded pretty basic but it was the beginning of a lifelong love of music. Many of us were inspired by two of the teachers in particular - conductors Malcolm Fletcher and Jim Haworth who coaxed and cajoled the Intermediate Orchestra and then despatched us to listen to the last half an hour of the LSSO rehearsing under Eric, to see and hear for ourselves what the future could hold for us. Malcolm and Jim were two key members of Eric's staff and like so many children before and since they helped me to progress through the feeder orchestras until eventually reaching the LSSO where I spent four happy years. Violin lessons were given by a wonderful character called Lambert Wilson, a proud Scot and former member of the Scottish National Orchestra. Lambert guided many a young player through the ranks including his brilliantly gifted son, Rolf, who is one of the country's finest violinists. Eric Pinkett chose his staff wisely but he was the real driving force and without him at the helm the project almost certainly would not

have succeeded. The late 1960s and 70s were exciting times and the orchestra was fortunate enough to have made music with Sir Michael Tippett, Sir Arthur Bliss and Andre Previn.

The LSSO has given concerts in many major concert halls in this country and on the Continent and the list of eminent musicians who have been associated with it has grown longer over the years. Most distinguished of all was Sir Michael Tippett, who confirmed his admiration of the work of Eric Pinkett and the County School of Music by agreeing to be its patron and regular guest conductor in 1965. This was a masterstroke by Eric Pinkett who knew deep down that although he was the orchestra's strength he could also be its weakness. He was astute enough to realise that professional musicians could add something beneficial to the orchestra and help to accelerate the improvement in playing standards. The roster of visiting guest conductors included George Weldon, Sir Adrian Boult, Sir Malcolm Arnold, Rudolf Schwarz and the wonderful orchestral trainer Norman Del Mar. Norman was a regular visitor to Birstall for many years and it was his absolute insistence on professionalism that took the playing standards to a new high in 1968 when he conducted the orchestra in Vienna's Musikverein and the Mozarteum in Salzburg.

The Pinkett/Tippett partnership really gathered momentum in the late 1960s and this led to a series of regular TV and radio appearances. There was also a superb concert given in the Berlin Philharmonie in 1969 under Tippett's direction that included *Brigg Fair*, *Putnam's Camp* and *Quiet City* played by the orchestra's brilliant trumpet player Jimmy Watson who is sadly no longer with us. Numerous commercial gramophone recordings were released, concentrating on repertoire that was not otherwise available in the catalogues. Eric was a shrewd PR and marketing man and he realised that LSSO recordings of standard classical repertoire would offer nothing of real, lasting value. Such recordings would also have limited appeal and sales potential. The solution was to bring to the wider public the works of, amongst others, Tippett, Bliss and Mathias. This also avoided direct - and potentially cruel - comparison with the top professional orchestras. The LSSO also achieved the distinction of being first in the field with two recordings of the music of Havergal Brian for the Unicorn and CBS labels.

Eric was always the first to give credit to his staff at the County School of Music whose teaching had produced many young players of a high enough quality to obtain places in most of the leading British symphony orchestras. He acknowledged, too, the part played by Stewart Mason in being such a supportive Director of Education as well as helping to launch the LSSO on its series of foreign tours. Stewart and his wife regularly attended LSSO concerts overseas. Indeed, the couple's two sons were members of the orchestra - professional cellist Tim who died at a tragically young age and viola player Benedict who has made a name for himself as one of the country's leading composers. When all is said and done, the Leicestershire adventure owes everything to the dream which Eric Pinkett cherished through his difficult and taxing early days as Music Adviser. Eric wrote his book *Time to Remember* in 1969 as a part of the 21st anniversary celebrations of the County School of Music and it can be recommended whole heartedly to anyone interested in music or, for that matter, anyone who enjoys a good story. Eric Pinkett, O.B.E. (the honour came in 1972) died in 1979 just 3 years after his retirement. He was a kind, charismatic man who had almost entirely by his own vision and work ethic made Leicestershire arguably the foremost education authority in UK for music. His idea was that every child should come to love music as a result of playing a musical instrument. He certainly succeeded in reaching this goal.

John Whitmore