



by Kimberly Davis

John Rutter: 60 Years Young

A True British Gentleman

With a title like "best-selling living British classical composer," you would think that John Rutter might be unapproachable. Nothing could be further from the truth. This composer/conductor/record label owner and all-around extremely talented man has the manners and generosity of a true British gentleman. His passion and excitement for life and music are infectious. He was kind enough to invite me to his home for some English tea and a chat about his life and career.

InsideCx: How did music enter your life? J.R.: There was an old out-of-tune piano in my parents' apartment, which was only there because the previous occupants had left it behind. My father occasionally would play by ear. He never had any training in music and never learned how to read music, though I think he did love music. I remember he would play, not very expertly, some of the old dance-band hits of his youth. And so that was the first live music I heard in the home as a baby. It wasn't long before I was climbing up to that piano myself and playing by ear. I would spend happy hours lost in a world of my own. By 6 or 7 years of age, I was spending quite a few hours a day quietly sitting at the piano by myself and probably annoying the neighbors. My poor parents—they were very good about it.

InsideCx: Were you good at music in school? My first social music-making was at school. I remember my first singing report card. It was shown to me many years later. It says, "Sings well when he sings softly." That was really where it began.

My parents noticed I was very musical and sent me to a musical school in North London, Highgate School. I suppose my talents were encouraged at an early age. I sang in the choir. And it wasn't that long before I actually began to put things down on paper. I suppose I was 10 or 11, which by the standards of someone like Mozart is not actually that young, but that was

when I began to realize that I didn't just like making music; I wanted to leave music behind in a permanent form.

I think that's the big difference between the composer and the performer. The composer wants to leave a legacy, and performers prefer the magic of live performance.

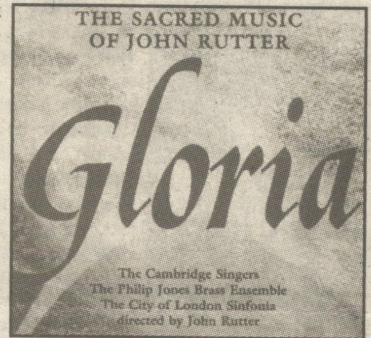
Of course I enjoyed both, but from very early on it was clear that somehow composition had marked me out. It's very cliché but nevertheless true that you don't choose composition as a way of life, it chooses you.

InsideCx: Tell me more about Highgate School. I wasn't the only composer at Highgate School. There were quite a number of us who were encouraged to compose and allowed to think of it as normal. For high school kids it might be thought a little unusual, but in our school it really wasn't.

The most noticeable of my contemporaries was Sir John Tavener, who has made an international reputation as a composer, so it's extraordinary that we were both there at the same time.

InsideCx: Was there a competitive spirit? We were best buddies, and I think the world has a kind of competitive edge to it. Nobody has ever asked me that before, but looking back on it, he showed me his latest compositions and I showed him my latest compositions. 🎵

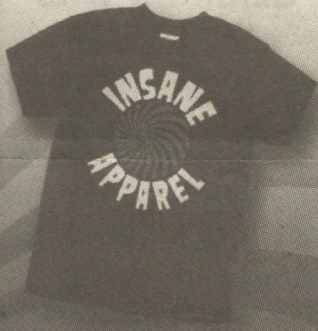
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