

RECALLING FINZI

Difficult to recall Gerald Finzi without recalling the whole ‘lost domain’ of Ashmansworth in our youth; scenes from some gentle, bucolic – possibly Hardy-esque – tale, often played out in the kitchen, with Jack and Olive much in evidence, and cats, and Scotts, and Shush, Liddy; and as yet no tinge of sadness or tragedy. A large cast of family and friends and visitors, in which Gerald came and went unobtrusively: indeed, his presence most markedly signalled by his absence.

Everything made a profound impression. Quite as astonishing and ‘formative’ as meeting a real composer was my first encounter with yoghurt; all sorts of doors were unlocked. The place seemed paradise, and its natives – well, incredibly beautiful, lively, and free – (or am I reading the past with Traherne’s eyes?). A wonderful blustery afternoon, high on Inkpen, flying kites, all of us exhilarated; Gerald wrapped up in his manure-coloured tweed overcoat, shouting instructions. Quietness in the car on the way back. Fatigue? Or reflection, satisfaction? Composing, perhaps? Certainly I sensed a space around the silent man sitting in the passenger seat in front, as we bumped our way back. Tea – Lapsang, served without milk and sugar, from a handsome faded Rockingham teapot, lustre on the cups: everything – like the Arran sweaters, the muesli (authentic), the obscene Bulgarian ‘culture’ on the windowsill – exotic to this very young novice. Later, as the light faded, lamps would be lit. Gerald would disappear to the book-room with Joy: always the sound of typing – like a kind of drone. Afterwards, much horseplay as we got ourselves ready for bed: Nigel especially ruthless with the waterbombs as I remember. Such a wide dynamic range of high spirits and work: on the one hand the laughter and sweet teasing – (I can still hear it: nobody immune – Joy literally crying with laughter); and on the other, all those heaps of books everywhere; orchestral parts to be corrected; *Musica Britannica* proofs to be read; and that entirely hidden life upstairs in the music room, that lookout-post that I penetrated only after Gerald’s death. (I know now the whole family were guarding him).

I remember when he took me into the apple-shed, another special precinct obviously: quiet, dry, steeped in a tart, musky aroma; the ranks of apples orderly and tranquil. Alas, I totally failed to comprehend the Orphic mysteries enshrined therein; and now it seems to me astonishing that I did not recognize the preciousness of that archive that he was laying down – long before ‘conservation’ became a buzz-word. But I was too callow to be capable of focussing properly on what he could have told me or shown me; also too affected and too fixed in what was obviously an ‘unreliable’ musical taste. (He was fairly dogmatic and scornful about, for instance, my passion for Rachmaninov; and he saw ‘dangers’ in my intoxication in French music. But at least we agreed on Ravel!). I wish I could have grown up a bit more: found that focus sooner. (He wrote such kind letters to me when I was on National Service in Cyprus: so concerned). Now, having caught up with him at 55, I believe we would have understood one another very well.

(From Ellesmere Festival programme booklet, 1989).