

TRIBUTE FROM PHILIP WALSH

When at the tender age of 22 I was appointed to succeed Peter Godfrey as director of music of this cathedral, I'm sure the question on many lips was "How can one so young and inexperienced step into the shoes of such a great man? (or in the words of Jean Liner, "he's only a child") Though I would never have admitted it at the time, those were my own worries too, but from the very first moment I was struck by the incredible support I was to receive from the great man himself, ensuring that things go as smoothly as possible, and working to avoid any potential conflicts which might come my way. Before I even left for New Zealand a long letter arrived in Peter's inimitable hand, giving a blow by blow account of all aspects of cathedral life, including a detailed report on every member of the choir. I bet many would love to get their hands on that document, but I showed it to no one.

Throughout my ten years here I knew I could always count on Peter's support, counsel and above all, generosity. It was a different kind of support I received from Peter when on the now infamous occasion when conducting the Orpheus and the NZSO, that my shoulder decided to pop out of its socket. The story of Peter bounding in to the dressing room in the interval, while paramedics were figuring out what to do with me, saying what can I do, grabbing the score of the Brahms Requiem before stepping on stage to conduct the rest of the concert, is now the stuff of legend. Peter gashed his hand during that performance and when the score was returned to me the next day it was splattered with his blood on just about every page. The replacement score which Peter kindly bought and inscribed is one of my most treasured possessions.

We mourn the loss of a giant of choral music with good reason but I also mourn the loss of a man of such kindness and generosity who made what could have been a difficult time so seamless. It is this generosity of spirit that I remember most about him, generosity in the most practical sense.

When I asked Peter what he did on the boat trip the first time he made the voyage from England to New Zealand, he looked at me with an expression as if to say what a stupid question, and he said I formed a choir.

I like to imagine that there are new choirs of angels being formed as we speak, and heaven help them if they are singing flat.

Thank you Peter and rest in peace.