

TIMES ONLINE

From «The Times»
March 13, 2007

Julian Budden

Broadcaster and scholar of Italian opera whose research did much to secure Verdi's historical reputation

April 9, 1924 - February 28, 2007

Julian Budden was a leading figure in the rehabilitation of Verdi that, steadily progressing after the war, gained impetus until by the end of the century the composer had reached his now unchallenged position as one of history's greatest.

Budden achieved this by patient archival research, practical musicianship, a sense of history and wide cultural sympathies. Though a shy man, he had the human insight to understand the vast range of characters who people Verdi's operas. The dry wit that went with this salted his careful, well-rounded prose.

He was born at Hoyleake, Cheshire, in 1924, and went up to Queen's College, Oxford, where he read classics, taking his BA in 1948 and MA in 1951. Seeking a more professional knowledge of music than his Oxford years had provided, he then read for a BMus at the Royal College of Music. He studied the bassoon with Archie Camden and composition with Patrick Hadley. He won the Colles Essay Prize, and having taken the BMus in 1955, he continued the career at the BBC which he had embarked upon while still at the college. He became a music producer in 1955 and chief opera producer from 1970 to 1976, when he was appointed external music organiser.

Though he was never a corporation man, Budden's work at the BBC was influential. A first-rate broadcaster, as emerged especially after he had left the BBC, he was also a brilliant producer of others' work. He was scrupulous, but not interfering, in improving scripts, and a kindly presence in the studio, able to help from what had already become a deep knowledge of Italian opera, and encouraging to contributors sometimes in awe of this knowledge. Behind his formal, rather reserved nature there was warmth and goodwill.

These qualities found outlet from the late 1960s in contributions to Verdi journals and conferences, which led to the invitation to write a full-scale study of Verdi's operas. Though he expressed some diffidence about the task, it was one which he found congenial. The outcome was three volumes, *The Operas of Verdi*, published in 1973, 1978 and 1981. They remain, in the face of an ever-rising tide of Verdi research, books to which scholars, performers and enthusiasts continue to turn as their first (and sometimes final) port of call for information and stimulus.

Every opera is discussed in detail, its literary background, the history of its composition, and the music as it animates the drama. The books are free from obscure technical analysis

or deconstructionist jargon; and Budden was not afraid to correct, in the last volume, slips made in earlier volumes.

One of these involved himself as a BBC producer, when in some excitement he put on a programme about an operatic «discovery» that was shaking the world of Verdi scholarship, only to have a listener write in to identify it as an early salon piece. «There were,» he commented, «a few red faces in Verdian circles that day.» His own naturally rubicund countenance was good-naturedly among them.

Budden never held a full-time academic post, though he was held in high regard by the academic community. He was a Fellow of the British Academy, which in 1980 awarded him its Derek Allen Prize for his work on Verdi. The three key volumes were distilled into a one-volume *Verdi* (1985) for the Master Musicians series, to which he also contributed *Puccini* in 2005.

By then his love of Italy had led to him finding a flat in Florence, where he spent the half of the year in which he was not in London. From Italy he sent lively, scholarly, sometimes a trifle peremptory reports on the operatic scene to *Opera* magazine. Despite putting down some roots in Italy with a partner, he needed contacts in London to stem the self-confessed loneliness that could afflict him. Though a very private man, he was a welcome and cordial companion, and always a free-flowing and even sparkling fount of knowledge on Italian opera.

Julian Budden, Verdi scholar, was born on April 9, 1924. He died on February 28, 2007, aged 82