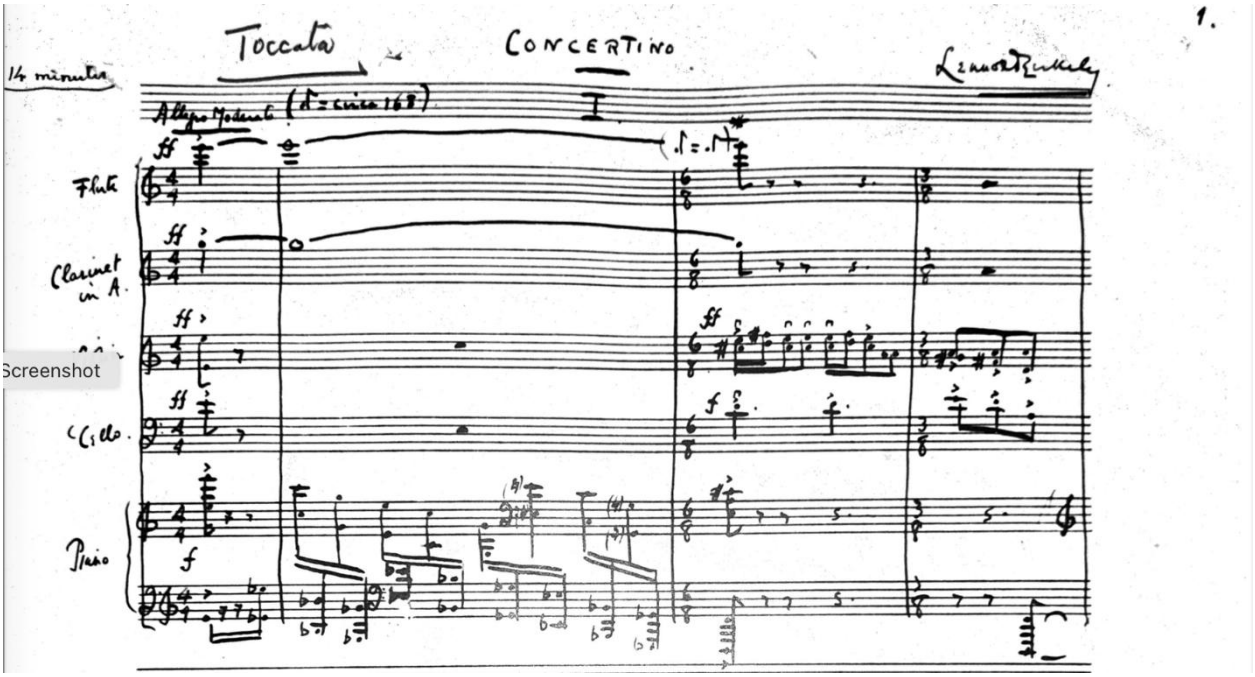Lennox Berkeley Society Newsletter

Issue 12

September 2026

What is the most exciting news that a Berkeley Society Newsletter could possibly present as its headline?
A newly discovered work by Lennox Berkeley!

Yes, a *Concertino* for chamber ensemble, labelled "*Toccata*", has been uncovered. Nathalie Castinel, Curator of Heritage Collections at Lyon Conservatoire, made the discovery while cataloguing the library of Nadia Boulanger, Berkeley's teacher. Dated 1937, the work is scored for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano, in 3 movements.



Although the work was bound by Berkeley's publisher, Chester's, there is no evidence that it was ever published. Adam has examined this new *Concertino* and produced a typeset score, from which we hope to arrange a premiere performance at our next AGM.

Building Bridges with the Britten Pears Archive

In the last year, Adam and Dinah have been regular visitors to The Red House, Aldeburgh, home of Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears, which now houses the Britten Pears Archive.

Access to the Archive may yield material of interest to Berkeley enthusiasts and scholars, and equally the liaison may be beneficial to the Britten Pears Arts charity. For example, the Head of Archive and Library, Dr Christopher Hilton, was invited to Cambridge – a city associated with Britten – to give an enthralling lecture on Britten and Pears at the University Church, organised by Dinah and Adam. Aside from the musical insights, the lecture highlighted the remarkably comfortable correspondence between Britten and Queen Elizabeth II, and told of the elaborate administrative masquerade necessary for Britten and Pears to live together as partners in an era when such a relationship was a crime.



Adam & Dinah with Chris Hilton at The Red House

Berkeley at the Proms

John Wilson and the Sinfonia of London opened their Proms concert on 6th September with Berkeley's *Serenade* for strings, followed by works by Britten, Frank Bridge and Imogen Holst. Adam attended, with Dinah, and wrote the following report for us:

At the beginning of September, I had the pleasure of attending a BBC Prom that for me, couldn't have been a more enticing programme. John Wilson and the Sinfonia of London Strings gave a concert that included works by Benjamin Britten and my former composition teacher, Lennox Berkeley.

This was all the more meaningful to me as it was Berkeley's Serenade that was my introduction to his music and why I approached him for lessons.

The first movement starts with a whimsical theme and in this performance it was introduced as it should be with refinement and subtlety. The music proceeded with grace and poise and was never overstated.

One of the great strengths of the Sinfonia of London is how they manage to get such contrasts in dynamics and how they can achieve the quietist of pianos when needed. This was a lovely performance.

The second movement was the one that first attracted me to this work. Its slightly foreboding main melody goes through a number of interesting harmonic machinations that present it in different emotional contexts.

This was performed slightly faster than on their award winning Chandos recording and it is good to hear how interpretation can develop with increased performance.

The following scherzo movement was full of drive and clarity. These string players are some of the best in the land with Charlie Lovell-Jones as leader and Jonathan Asgaard, who recently featured in the Proms as soloist in Walton's cello concerto as lead cellist. No wonder then that some of the most athletic passages were executed with pin-point accuracy and poise. This is a wonderful movement in which the momentum is sustained throughout and Berkeley introduces interesting (col legno) effects and contrasts.

Up until this point, the music could be seen as 'absolute' but in contrast, the finale is far more psycho-programmatic. Berkeley started composing the Serenade at The Old Mill near Snape which he shared for a time with Britten. The music starts with a rather constrained rising melody that then falls back in a questioning manner. This movement of the four is the hardest to interpret. Berkeley was going through a difficult time after parting from Britten who had left him for Peter Pears. Britain was also entering the second world war. Composing music that reflects inner feelings, disappointment, hope and resignation is challenging. Berkeley does it extremely well without reverting to sentimentality.

I have to admit, that I was waiting to see how John Wilson would tackle this and I can say that he achieved poetry in music from sadness to yearning and then resignation.
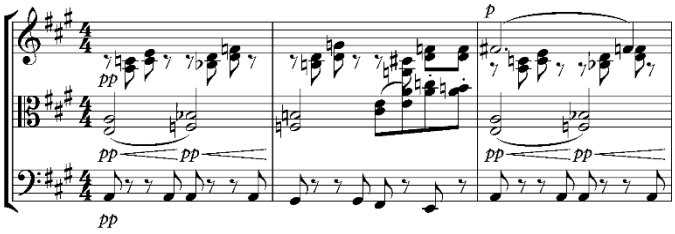


Adam at the The Old Mill,
on a hill overlooking Snape

The rest of the prom consisted of works by Britten and his mentor, Frank Bridge, and Imogen Holst.

As a conductor, I feel that making music accessible to listeners is essential and I don't believe that any one interpretation is biblical. Rather, it is interesting to see how different versions can bring new meaning and I look forward to many more performances of the Serenade.

The concert took place on the 6th September and is available from that date for 30 days on BBC Sounds. The Wilson recording of the Serenade is available on Chandos.



Celebrating Berkeley's Influence at a Birthday Party

The conductor and composer Christopher Dawe, who was taught by Berkeley at Malvern College, and went on to found the Anton Bruckner Choir, is about to mark his 60th birthday with a concert of his own compositions.

Concerning his music, composed over five decades, Chris sent us the following touching message:

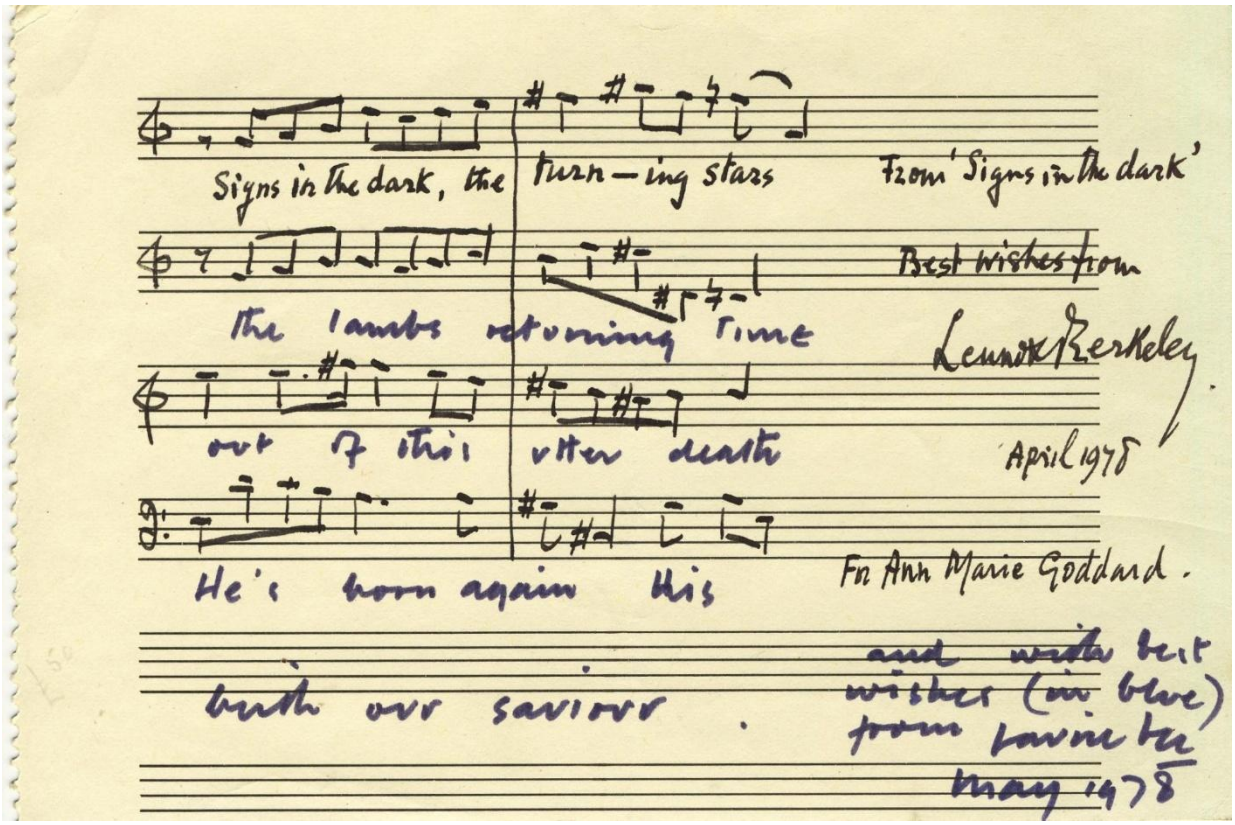
The importance of Lennox in starting me off on the composing journey will be a major theme of the concert, and the earliest music (written when I was 16 years old) certainly bears his imprint (in a wholly positive way).

Berkeley and Laurie Lee

Ivo de Galan (*imtherefore@gmail.com*), a retiring dealer of rare and autographed books and pictures, sent us an unexpected advertisement for an item in his collection, depicted below.
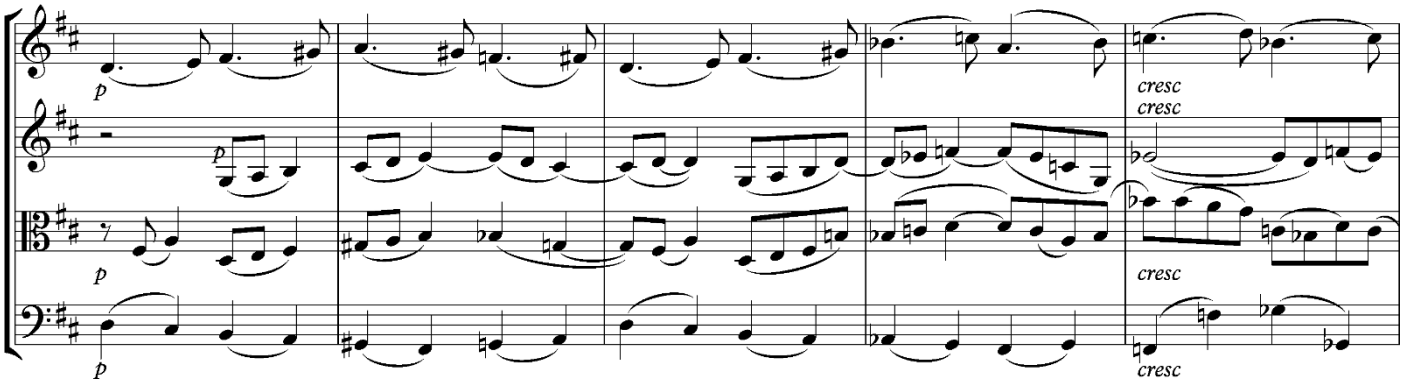
The text is from a Nativity poem by Laurie Lee (writer of *Cider with Rosie*), entitled *Twelfth Night*. The initial line and notes are in Berkeley's hand, continued by Lee, with the signatures of both.

Dated April 1978, Berkeley dedicates it to Ann Marie Goddard.



Signs in the dark, the turning stars,
The Lamb's returning time.
Out of this utter death he's born again,
His birth our saviour…

From *Twelfth Night*, by Laurie Lee



With all best wishes for what's currently shaping up to be a damp autumn – and thanks as always for reading,

Ash Bridges (Editor, and now Hon. Treasurer)