

IN 1989 falls the thirtieth anniversary of the death of the composer of 'In a Monastery Garden', Albert Ketèlbey, who lived on the Isle of Wight. Although millions of people have enjoyed his music, we know almost nothing about Ketèlbey, the man.

Ketèlbey was born in Birmingham in 1875. At the age of only eleven, he had a piano sonata performed at Worcester, which was praised by Elgar. Aged only sixteen, Ketèlbey became organist of St. John's church, Wimbledon. He won a scholarship to Trinity College of Music, and learned to play the piano, cello, clarinet, oboe and horn. His earliest published composition, a 'Peasant Dance', dates from 1896. He became a young professor at the College, and in order to look older, wore a tail coat.

Aged twenty-two, he became music director of the Vaudeville Theatre. Also he worked for a publisher as an arranger, eg of works by Elgar, Tchaikovsky, MacDowell, Messager, Lionel Monkton and Ivor Novello. In 1907 he became an impresario for the Columbia Gramophone Company. Herbert Ridout recalled, in 'The Gramophone' 1940, that Ketèlbey, (music director and advisor up to 1925, though he worked occasionally for the company up to 1930), was very energetic, painstaking, and effective in dealing with the demands of temperamental artists and the then new technology. He 'never lost the spirit of gramophone adventure'.

As a composer, Ketèlbey had his first big hit with 'Phantom Melody' 1912. The very title evokes the world of silent films. Ketèlbey produced instrumental music to accompany films — 'New Moving Pictures Music' 1916 and a 'Loose Leaf Film Series' 1924.

'In a Monastery Garden', his greatest success, published in 1915, made him famous. But it is little known that the music has a connection with Guildford. In 1910, Ketèlbey and a publisher, Joseph Larway visited the Franciscan Friary, Sample Oask Lane, Chilworth, Guildford, where Larway's brother,



Not a monastery but the Franciscan Friary at Chilworth, Guildford, said to have inspired the famous work.

In a Friary Garden . . .

ALBERT KETÈLBEY'S FAMED MONASTERY MAY HAVE BEEN JUST A GUILDFORD FRIARY BUT WHILE ROMANCE SURVIVES HIS MUSIC LIVES ON . . .

By MICHAEL DAWNEY

Edgar, had entered the novitiate in 1909. According to the legend in 'Franciscans Here and There', during a walk in the woods, Ketèlbey said to Larway, 'I've got an idea — If I put it on paper, will you publish it?' Hence 'In a Monastery Garden'. However, this attractive, romantic story may conflict with the facts, since the melody may have existed in a string quartet, then been expanded with birdsong, monks chanting, organ playing and chapel bells ringing. The piece became so popular at Bridlington summer season, that publishers competed to publish it, so Ketèlbey was able to dictate terms. As well as a flute suggesting birds, Ketèlbey had a bird-warbler playing, thus anticipating the miraculous nightingale heard from a gramophone record in Respighi's 'Pines of Rome' 1924. One of the reasons for the enormous success of 'In a Monastery Garden' was the demand for comfort from soldiers and the bereaved after the devastating 'War to end Wars'. 'In a Monastery Garden' was published in every conceivable arrangement, from grand organ to piano accordion. The sheet music, produced with attractive covers, is now a collector's item. Fr. Edgar Larway kept the manuscript until 1959, and then he gave it to the archives of the Franciscan order.

Ketèlbey followed 'In a Monastery Garden' with a series of works full of vivid (some said garish) cinematographic colour, 1920-31, 'In a Persian Market', 'Sanctuary of the Heart', 'In a Chinese Temple Garden', 'Bells across the meadow', 'The Clock and the Dresden Figures' and 'In the mystic land of Egypt'. Ketèlbey's works often tell a story, the players are required to sing at odd points, and he often inserted quirky, amusing quotations from other composers.

'In a Persian Market' reminds us of dances from Saint-Saëns' opera 'Sampson and Delilah'. 'Sanctuary of the Heart' 1924 has the subtitle 'Méditation religieuse', like that of the Gounod-Bach 'Ave Maria': 'Sanctuary of the Heart' copies the lush, introspective, sentimental style of Gounod. 'In a Chinese Temple Garden' 1925, an oriental fantasy, opens with arresting, oriental chords, as in Puccini's 'Turandot' 1926. 'Bells across the meadows' 1927 was arranged for military band by Sir Dan Godfrey, conductor of the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra. It was originally a song.



Albert Ketèlbey.

Ketèlbey's success resulted from a mix of religiosity, amorosness, introspection and colour, as in Cecil B de Mille's films.

Though Ketèlbey's most popular works were those offering comfort, he also wrote vivacious, amusing pieces. 'Bank Holiday' ('Appy 'Ampstead) 1924, with its knockabout fun, quotes the song 'When you are in love', and resembles Eric Coates' style. Similarly, 'The Dance of the Merry Mascots' quotes the 'Eton Boating Song' and a waltz. Towards the end the song and the waltz are combined. Finally, the chimes of Big Ben are heard, as in Vaughan Williams' 'London Symphony' 1914 and Coates' 'London Again' suite 1936.

Ketèlbey's work featured in Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra concerts. In 1924 he conducted the *première* of his 'Suite Romantique' dedicated to Sir Dan Godfrey, at the Winter Garden. In 1927 Ketèlbey conducted movements from his 'Cockney Suite', and in 1931 came the *premières* of 'Knights of the King' and 'The vision of Fuji-san'.

From 1927 to about 1939 Ketèlbey gave annual concert tours. From about 1940 he retired, though he composed pieces for special occasions, eg the patriotic song 'Fighting for freedom' 1941, performed by the Portsmouth band of the Royal Marines, which quotes the four notes of the V for Victory sign (from Beethoven's 'Fifth Symphony'). Ketèlbey lived on Egypt Hill, Cowes. He died in 1959, having lived in Appley Rd., Cowes. At his cremation at Golders Green, 'In a Monastery Garden' was played.

Discussing Ketèlbey is complicated by several factors. Though he was immensely prolific (he wrote 125 works for orchestra alone), not even the copyright British Library has a complete set of his works. Ventnor Public Library has some. A 1952 work 'Brading Down' cannot be trace. He rearranged many works. Nor did Ketèlbey welcome biographical enquiries, perhaps because he had been involved, in the 1920s, in correspondence in the music

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press, because of antagonism from music critics. Also he used many pseudonyms, Willam Aston, Raoul Clifford, Geoffrey Kaye, Anton Vodorinsky, André de Basque and Dennis Charlton; like several contemporaries, Edward German (really Edward German Jones), Henry Wood

(Paul Klenvosky) and Ivor Novello (David Ivor Davies). Though Ketèlbey wrote 'serious' music, none of it caught on. Tom McCanna, who played viola in the Irving Mullen Light Orchestra at the old Community Centre, Twyford Avenue, Portsmouth, is researching his music (to whom I am grateful in researching this article — he is now Sheffield University Music Librarian).

Ketèlbey conveyed instant images. He appeals to our imagination and fantasy.

His pieces were not meant to be academically analysed. The chant, 'Kyrie', from 'In a Monastery Garden' is unlike genuine plainsong. Strictly speaking, Chilworth is a friary, inhabited by friars, not a monastery, with monks; but these are trifling considerations. Ketèlbey's music has reached millions of people. As notes on a 1928 Columbia record album tell us, Ketèlbey's music 'will live as long as romance has its place in our lives'.