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Obituary: Christopher Keyte

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Kenneth Shenton writes:

CHRISTOPHER KEYTE was both one of the last post-war trebles educated at St Michael's College, Tenbury, in Worcestershire, and one of Boris Ord's last choral scholars at King's College, Cambridge, who became a fine and most versatile baritone, serving sacred and secular music with equal devotion.

Born in the Kent village of Shorne on 11 September 1935, Christopher Charles Keyte was the only son of Frank Owen Keyte, a civil servant, and his wife, Melissa (née Fenwick). At St Michael's, Tenbury, Keyte's fellow choristers included the conductor and organist Christopher Robinson and the former army officer, explorer, and author John Blashford Snell.

After Alleyn's School, Dulwich, and King's College, Cambridge, Keyte began his professional career as a Vicar Choral at St Paul's Cathedral. His versatility led to his

singing in intimate choral ensembles. He joined the Linden Singers and the Purcell Consort of Voices, occasionally contributed to the Deller Consort, and helped to establish the reputation of Pro Cantione Antiqua. This group of six or nine *a cappella* male voices became specialists in rarefied medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque repertoire, each often curated by their music adviser, Bruno Turner. Keyte also took his place within John McCarthy's ever-expanding Ambrosian umbrella, be it with the Ambrosian Singers, the Ambrosian Consort, the Ambrosian Light Opera Chorus, or the John McCarthy Singers, who were regulars on BBC Radio 2's *Friday Night is Music Night*.

As a stalwart of the English choral tradition, he was in demand in both London and the provinces, on the South bank and at the Three Choirs Festival. At Gloucester Cathedral in August 1983, he proved more than a match for the many challenges inherent in Paul Patterson's *Mass of the Sea*. This and many more performances endure, courtesy of an extensive and richly diverse discography.

Among these are Monteverdi madrigals and Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers*, as well as the solo songs of Roger Quilter, Alexander Glazunov, and Ivor Gurney. Sadly neglected is a 1984 recording at the City Temple of one of Eric Thiman's more extensive and deeply felt sacred compositions, the cantata *The Last Supper*. One recording that remained a bestseller was of the Vivaldi Gloria and the Pergolesi Magnificat, with Dame Janet Baker, Ian Partridge, the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields, and the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, all expertly shaped by David Willcocks.

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Keyte was also familiar with the stages of both Covent Garden and Snape Maltings. With the Fires of London, an ensemble dedicated to the theatrical works of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, he performed such works as the chamber opera *The Martyrdom of St Magnus*, the opera *The Lighthouse*, and the operettas *The No 11. Bus* and *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame*.

Keyte met June Seaward while performing on BBC Radio's schools singing series, *Singing Together*. They married in 1977. Their influence, particularly as teachers, was immense, not least as the founder directors of Children's International Voices of Enfield. Keyte also taught many of this country's leading practitioners throughout his years as a Professor of Singing at the Royal Academy of Music. In 2005, both he and June were awarded an honorary doctorate by Anglia Ruskin University. The same year, June was also appointed MBE for services to music and to the community in London. Christopher Keyte died on 25 May, aged 88. June predeceased him in 2020.

