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'A History of North Regional Broadcasting' - SIR CHARLES GROVES, CBE

(INTERVIEW 8 - followed by LADY HILARY GROVES - Notes and TIMINGS).

00.11.

Trevor Hill From day one in 'The History of North Regional Broadcasting', music has been to the fore. Admittedly the very first programme broadcast from the **Metrovicks Experimental Station on May 17th, 1922** consisted of gramophone recordings; Fritz Kreisler playing 'Berceuse' .. 'on Wavelength 400 metres', and a Fox Trot played by the **Joseph C Smith Orchestra** was heard on 'wavelength 450 meters', - this, I should add, with the mechanical assistance of the 'New Edison Diamond Disc Phonograph' on loan, incidentally, from a Manchester shop.

00.50 And when **Station 2 ZY** officially began a regular service of broadcasting on the 15th of **November 1922**, **Kenneth Wright** the very **first Station Manager** was also the station's pianist. He used a Steinway 'baby' grand - on loan from the firm's London showroom.

01.10 One of the 'first night stars' from the **Trafford Park** studio, was **Isobel Baillie**. And her broadcast recital was 'live' !.

Some 22 years later, when a young **Charles Groves** was appointed the permanent conductor of the **BBC Northern Orchestra**, I imagine things were a little more 'established'.

01.36

Sir Charles: (Mentions **Dan Godfrey Jnr** - and his own link with his father, Sir Dan Godfrey and Bournemouth. Music being his first love, Dan Jnr formed the '**2ZY Orchestra**'. Dan then succeeded by **T.H. Morrison**, etc. Then in 1934 what had been known as the '**BBC Wireless Orchestra**' became '**The Northern Orchestra**' as it was when he became its conductor.

02.32

That had been started by **Hubert Foster Clarke**, heir to the 'custard' millions. To tell the green eye-shade story, please; of the musician who wore the shade, 'to blot out bloody conductor'. Charles followed **Julius Harrison**, after a gap, as conductor, - was appointed by the then Head of Northern Regional music, **Maurice Johnston**. Charles joined in 1944. In the 'gaps'; **Barbarolli**, **Beecham**, **Bolt** and **Harty**, as conductors.

04.36

TH: You once told me rather a nice story about your first meeting with Beecham. (You asked if you could assist - he asked you to take his 'Roberts' radio into the artists' Green Room and keep an ear open for the latest 'Test' score - and to 'Report back from time to time')

Charles (Tells the story; Maurice having been Beecham's private secretary)
05,55

TH (Asks him about his boyhood backgrounds as 'A ward in Chancery')

Charles: (Responds - mother died when 10, father as a result of the 1918 war. She played the piano at the local church. He became a St Paul's chorister in 1924 and sang there until 1930, music becoming his life; the Royal College was followed by accompanying for the BBC, piano and organ being his instruments, and his interest in coaching in Opera)

07.45

TH Before you were appointed as conductor of the BBC Northern Orchestra in 1944, you'd been working with the BBC in London.

Charles (Talks about the **BBC Theatre Orchestra** in 1939; when he was just 24; his first opportunity to conducted being with the **BBC Revue Orchestra** which had been the old '**BBC Television Orchestra**')
Under Copyright

08.36

TH: What were your first impressions of the BBC in Manchester ?

Charles (mentions he was frightened being suddenly thrown into a repertoire of several concerts a week conducting an orchestra of very experienced musicians. The comment of one; 'Just leave it to us' being the suggestion at the end of one rehearsal. Their kindness to him).

10.00

TH (asks about the members of the Music Department when Charles took up his Manchester BBC staff post)

Charles (To mention **Maurice Johnstone** as Head, **Arthur Spencer** chief Assistant, and the splendid **Winifred Roberts** - as secretary of the Orchestra; looking after contracts, booking of deputies, etc)

10.33

TH: Since it was still wartime when you took over the Orchestra, was the Region doing any special Music programmes; such as touring Service camps, Lunch-time recitals ?

Charles (To recall one factory visit with Julius Harrison conducting; the hooter sounding off halfway through a soft passage of the 'Peer Gynt Suite'; the one group of workers 'clumping out'; the other coming in - and Harrison's reaction. Goes on to talk about his own early work in **Studio 1** - too small and acoustically unsatisfactory. Finally getting into the **Milton Hall** on Deansgate, Manchester.

12.12

TH (Mentions the range of music from the North when he joined)

Charles (recalls some of the Music O.B's, - Choral works broadcast from the Region; e.g King George's Hall, Blackburn with the orchestra)

13.29

TH: (Mentions **Reginald Stead**, the leader of the orchestra for many many years)

Charles (to talk about him, please - and others who stood out. Your story of the 'Clockwork mouse' which was released across the floor during a broadcast; the 'standby item' in case of an under-run - and the 'missing celeste').

15.50 They talk in some detail here about **Maurice Johnstone**; your work for '**Children's Hour**' for **Nan Macdonald** with **Violet Carson**, etc. His pre-concert Talks from Studio 4, B.H.; the young member of the audience bearing a miniature score who 'told you off' for omitting a part of a Haydn symphony).

17.58

TH: (Recalls another youngster who sent in a composition for 'Your Own Ideas' and Charles's comment; 'Either brilliant or slightly mad. I'd get him in'. The work **Max Davies** and you did together in later years; your interest over the years in 'New Music')

19.00

Charles (talks about the stimulation he receive from working on new scores).

19.42

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TH (Mentions his starting of and contribution to **'The Midday Concerts'**)

Charles (to talk about these Midday Proms and getting the orchestra out of a BBC studio. The 'coming and going' of the audience)

TH (Mentions Charles's departure for the **Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra**)

Charles (responds - refers to his earlier secondment to the Australian Broadcasting Commission; his decision to try and further his career)

TH: (Mentions that, shortly after his arrival, the **New Bournemouth Orchestra** appeared for the first time at the **BBC Proms**)

Charles: (explains 1955 - And when the orchestra got onto the stage, how all the audience started singing, 'I DO like to be beside the seaside')

22.25

TH: BBC Musicians are sometimes put in a difficult position. They are members of staff - and yet outside there is the all-powerful Musicians Union - and we both remember the Orchestral strike in the late 1970's when many of our colleagues were standing outside New Broadcasting House, Manchester whilst the rest of us were going into the building to work. Could that sort of situation arise again ?

Charles (Talks about the Regional organisation - his later experience when the BBC Scottish Orchestra was under threat; he and Sir Geriant Evans etc standing in protest outside B.H.London. 'It could hapen again').

24.08

TH: Do you remember a 1948 BBC publication entitled, **'This is the North of England'**?. In fact on the one page is a photo of Charles Groves, in the days before your C.B.E., with a small insert of the man himself. And on the facing page, an article written especially for the publication by **Sir Thomas Beecham** who writes, he says, as 'A Candid Friend' and begins, 'There is a general idea that I am what may be described as the Public Enemy No 1 of the British Broadcasting Corporation.' He was referring to his original opposition to the BBC being granted a monopoly - and to the fact that too many economic considerations were exercised by London. 'Musically', he writes, 'the North should have its powers and chances doubled to serve so large a region'. Now in the 1990's, the **'BBC Philharmonic** is second only to the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

(Cont:) But had there initially been an alternative broadcasting system, would each have employed its own 'house' orchestras ?

25.26

Charles (Replies - mentions one of the BBC's strengths has been to inherit the Reithian tradition of the BBC being a service and not a commercial organisation which has always maintained the House Orchestras; Hopes there will still be strong enough opinion in the future to justify the expense. From a musical point of view, the BBC has done more any other organisation and, in a way, more than even The Gramophone to stimulate musical intelligence and appreciation in this country).

27.15

TH: In asking you to be 'A Candid Friend', what in the BBC system have been the strengths and the weaknesses in the business of making music?

Charles (Replies - a sense of frustration in performing too often in the studio which can be detrimental to morale; Story of Maurice Johnstone talking him out to lunch - and then followed by his Haydn story).

(End - Sir Charles Groves Interview. Dur: 29'.29)

(Lady Hilary Groves - Interview Commences with:-)

TH: You have at least two musical children and, indeed, a musical grandson besides an ex BBC musical wife. What, I wonder, were Hilary Barchard's - as Lady Groves was; what were Hilary's first impressions back in 1944 of the new conductor ?.

Hilary (replies. Knew nothing about him until her friend, Rosemary Wells, spoke so highly of him)

30.39

TH: Like myself, you were a 'Junior Programme Engineer'. We set the microphones and did the 'balance and control.' Did the new chap with the baton congratulate you on your musical balances ?

31.40

Hilary (replies and then recalls being sent 'just temporarily' to Manchester as somebody had been called up. Recalls that morning's 'Programme Parade' which she was doing with Wilfred Pickles who was reading the News. He told her how lucky she was to be sent North)

32.27

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TH: (Asks who was in Manchester Programme Engineering at that time)

Hilary; (Mentions **Hugh Middlemas**, as Head, **Norman Fulton**; the long hours they worked; the **Watts Room** next door to the 'Children's Hour' office. Her letters home were headed thus, her mother writing back to enquire 'who is this Mr Watts ?').

TH: Reading the BBC Year Book for 1933; that's a little before our time, it states, 'The BBC was the first Broadcasting organisation to replace Engineers by Musicians for 'controlling' music'. And quite right too. It helps to read a score and to know when the 'loud bits' are coming.

Hilary: (Talks about those with technical and non technical skills; just where the 'Programme Engineer' part came in for trained musicians who did the microphone balances, timing etc; 'Now the BBC has a whole host of people doing a broadcast'. Talks about the happiness she derived from her work; how she and her colleagues really loved the BBC, 'never counting the hours we worked').

34.56

TH (asks if the BBC 'husband-and-wife' rule applied when she married)

Hilary (Replies - then mentions daughter Sally, Head of Contemporary music for a firm 'born more than trained'; Mary, mother of three but a very good viola player, and Jonathan, the youngest, now a concert Agent but former chorister at Kings and at St Paul's like his father).

36.23

TH (Mentions the 'Children's Hour' days in the North having been very exciting)

Hilary 'Well, they were unforgettable. Why are they so vivid in our memories now ?'. (Reminisces about Nan's contribution - her own assistance with Effects; Nan's remarkable range of output; engaging only the best writers, performers and musicians. 'I'd have done anything for her').

TH: (signs off the Interviews by thanking Sir Charles Groves and Lady Hilary Groves for contributing to 'A History Of North Regional Broadcasting').

INTERVIEW 8. Totals = 37'.52".