

## Memories of Rohan

I'm honoured to have a small share in today's tributes, on behalf of the Harrison family, whose connections with Rohan go back to 1959 or 1960, when he was studying at Oxford and living with the elderly Deneke sisters in Norham Gardens.

The Deneke sisters had been hosting concerts for the Oxford Ladies Musical Society (later the Oxford Chamber Music Society) for two decades. Quite as distinguished as the musicians were their guests, on one occasion including Albert Einstein. My grandmother Pat Harrison was invited to one of these recitals and went with my uncle Richard Harrison, who was then an undergraduate at Brasenose. Kodaly was visiting Oxford to receive an honorary degree, and was in the audience to hear the 21-year old Rohan play his cello sonata.

Pat was greatly struck by Rohan and invited him to stay with the family at Little Missenden in Buckinghamshire. On a walk through the fields above the village (looking down over the church and Missenden House where she was born), Pat remembered saying to Rohan that she felt she had not done anything very significant in her life. Rohan replied 'this place has a harmonious atmosphere – you should start a festival'. Pat recalled lying in bed the next morning, thinking 'I believe we could do something' and before long, a whirlwind of musical organisation was set in motion. The Little Missenden Festival was at the centre of her life until she died in 1998, and is still going over 65 years later. She always spoke of Rohan with great fondness, and made a memorable visit to his family in Sri Lanka.

Rohan remained loyal to the Festival over many decades. I tried searching the archive of the first 60 years of programmes for details of his concerts, and found his name appeared in 100 of the 104 pages. In the first festival he played Rubbra's cello sonata with the composer at the piano, and took part in the first children's concert, alongside my uncle Richard on the violin and my mother Ailsa on the lute. I remember as a young child in the 1970s sitting with Pat in the front row at one of Rohan's concerts, transfixed by the luminous intensity of his playing. By now he was usually performing with Druvi at the piano; one of their concerts in 1980 also included a piano duet played by Pat and John Tavener, another central figure in the early decades of the Festival.

Pat greatly admired Rohan's adventurous commitment to contemporary music, despite its sometimes extraordinary technical and logistical difficulties. My uncle Richard remembers Rohan's extremely funny account of the premiere of Stockhausen's *Helikopter*, requiring the four members of the Arditti Quartet to play in separate airborne helicopters, the composer mixing the sounds of the strings with the sinister noise of the helicopter blades from a central point on the ground. Originally commissioned for the Salzburg Festival, it fell victim to protests from the Austrian Green Party who objected to the pollution of Austrian airspace by Stockhausen; it was eventually premiered in Amsterdam with the four pilots from the Royal Dutch Airforce's display team listed among the performers.

Rohan was still performing at the Little Missenden Festival half a century after his first encounter with Pat. He is remembered with great warmth and admiration in our family, and in the small Buckinghamshire village where his inspired idea for a festival took wing.