

would affect the share price. Geoffrey Hawkes insisted it was Gishford who should resign, and brought up his poor handling of the agreement with the Argentine agent, Roberto Barry, as evidence of his incompetence. Roth weighed in with his reservations about Gishford's capacity to take over as publishing director, and dismissed his entire report on the US businesses as 'an unsatisfactory document that meant but little'. The writing was on the wall. LAB noted in his personal diary that a breakdown in trust had occurred which would have far-reaching implications.

The battle of Britten

What no one had anticipated was the reaction from Aldeburgh. LAB

recalled later how Britten had rung him in a towering fury and 'put me on the spot'. Britten suspected that Gishford had been set up, and that this was all a plot to undermine Britten's own position and to change the policy of the company. LAB tried earnestly to reassure him: 'This upheaval was not the result of some deep-laid plot... it arose because of an action of Tony's [Gishford] in New York which had made my position quite impossible.' He goes on to reassure him that his affairs will be dealt with in the meantime by Ernst Roth. Unaware of the ill feeling between the two, LAB suggests that Gishford was only a puppet to Roth anyway: 'However attached to Tony you had become, the "deus ex machina" was Ernst Roth. In all things that really matter his was the guiding hand.'

This was the last thing Britten wanted to hear. The loss of Gishford was a 'grievous blow'. Not one to give up easily on a cause, Britten went to see LAB with his accountant Leslie Periton with the intention of reversing Gishford's dismissal. For him to leave Aldeburgh on such a matter when the Festival was less than two weeks away – he was moving into the Red House and

Letter from Britten to Leslie
Boosey following the
resignation of Gishford (1958)

THE RED HOUSE, ALDEBURGH, SUFFOLK.

18th June, 1958.

Dear Leslie,

I had hoped to write again to you sooner, but the Festival here has taken all my time these last days.

Thank you for the prompt way in which you reacted to my letter written on the 4th, and for your efforts to seal the unhappy breach – even though unsuccessful, I am sure that they were worthwhile, since nothing that has happened has impaired my personal regard for Tony's abilities.

Had it not been that there seemed a chance of the restoration of the old position, I would have made, earlier, one or two comments on our talk together. As this restoration is now impossible, I think I had better do so now.

So far as the pursuance of serious music publishing is concerned, you suggested that one of the ways of implementing it (and to which I agreed) was to strengthen the serious music publishing side of the Board of Directors, either by adding a new Director, or even splitting the Board into two

- (a) Instrumental, and
- (b) Music publishing.

If this is done, however, I do hope that the music publishing business will be so placed financially as to make its future reasonably secure. I assume that you will now immediately start looking for a new assistant for Ernst, who will now be doubly pressed in his work, with a special directive to look after my work (although I should like to say, aside, that it is the whole catalogue of serious music which interest me, and of course which also indirectly affects the health of my own published works). I gave you one or two names as possible candidates for this position, and will continue to try and suggest others; but I must add that if people such as we are discussing are approached it may well be that they would not be interested unless there was a possibility of a directorship in the near future – otherwise I cannot imagine that they could be enticed away from their present important positions. In the meantime you yourself and Erwin Stein will be able to step in and handle such matters as Tony has been handling for me, and would have in the future handled, which would be too much for Ernst with all the important matters in which he is already involved. I will enclose a list, as complete as I can, of the current matters, but of course it will be difficult since so many

overseeing the first performance of *Noye's Fludde* – is a measure of its importance to him. The ever-attentive LAB succeeded in smoothing ruffled feathers, and Britten's next letter is more temperate, explaining that while he had thought that he personally might be able to 'heal the breach' he now realised that 'matters had gone too far'. He stressed again his complete confidence in Tony and his hope that 'there will not be a complete break. Differences have been brought to light, and perhaps could be settled for the benefit of all.' LAB replied that he, Roth and Geoffrey Hawkes had discussed the possibility of a 'via media' with Gishford and, of course, rejected it as unworkable. 'The tragedy lies in the fact that we had not recognised we were heading for trouble and taken action long ago.' Presumably, LAB means by this the jostling for position, the question of Roth's successor and the relationship that Gishford enjoyed with Britten, which was never approved of by Roth.

'I need in my publisher', Britten wrote in a letter to Roth, who was now his contact in the company, 'someone interested not only in my music as a "commodity" but in me as a person'. 'I am the last person to treat music as mere business,' Roth replied, 'and I am quite confident you will find that I am fully aware of the necessary human element ... believe me, you will find that I never fail you in this respect if only you will give me the opportunity.'

Roth protested too much: throughout the awkward correspondence that follows, his open, almost abject desire to be loved and accepted by Britten was bound to irritate the composer. Britten had always appreciated Roth's handling of business affairs ('Ernst has dealt splendidly with the ballet trouble,' he noted after a choreographer kicked up a fuss over one production of *The Prince of the Pagodas*; 'I'm so glad Ernst is going to Milan to unscramble it,' he mentioned on another

were discussed verbally, and some quite casually. The way that the interim regime should be worked would have to be discussed in great detail with Ernst, of course, with whom closest contact will have to be kept, profiting by his enormous knowledge and experience. – before the unfortunate occurrence in the near future of his retirement.

You also said you would reconsider the position of the Educational department, which was so splendidly handled by Ken Straker during his short sojourn. This is a branch of Boosey & Hawkes which you know I am, and have been, particularly concerned with, from the days of Friday Afternoons (which I was surprised to learn, accidentally, had been allowed to go out of print) to *Noye's Fludde*. This branch besides will, I should imagine, become more and more important if music teaching continues to grow as steadily in all kinds of schools as it is now growing. We all agreed that Ken Straker's loss was most unfortunate – the circumstances make it doubly so.

I have had an additional idea since we met, which I hope will interest you. Using our London house for the next few months is Mr. John Mundy, who will not be unknown to you. He is an old and trusted, musical and personal friend of mine. He was also a close friend in New York, where he lives, of Ralph Hawkes. He and his wife, Clytie Mundy, a famous singing teacher, have an unrivalled knowledge of American musical life. He was for many years orchestral Manager of the Metropolitan Opera House orchestra. He has now retired from the position, but although no longer young, he is full of vitality, and is a strong and wise character. Could he not be of some use to us, either in the New York business, or even here in an advisory capacity? You mentioned that you would consider new directors to strengthen the musical side, and it seems to me that he would be admirable if he would consider returning to England. I should add that he has no ambitions to start a new great career, but he is profoundly interested in music, in Boosey & Hawkes, and has a regard for my works. I would have deep confidence in him. Could you not meet him one day soon and discuss things, even casually, with him? I have myself discussed the general position with him, which was of course natural as he has been a close friend for many years.

I have already said how pleased I was to learn that your views coincided so much with mine and that you had sufficient confidence in me to discuss these matters so openly.

Yours sincerely,

