

Nelson Havelock OBE

25 May 1917 - 5 August 1996

The composer, pianist and conductor Havelock J. Nelson PhD DMus who has died in Belfast was one of Northern Ireland's leading musicians. Born in Cork, he was educated in Dublin where he studied medical science at Trinity College and music at the Royal Irish Academy of Music. Together with Constance Hardinge he co-founded the Dublin Orchestral Players in 1939, an amateur group set up with the aim of training young players and conductors and offering public performances of good-quality music, especially Irish music, of which they gave many premieres. A Quaker and pacifist, he served as a bacteriologist in the RAF during the war and, in 1947, joined the BBC in Belfast as resident accompanist, conductor and broadcaster, a post in which he spent the next thirty years. He was constantly on the look-out for new talent and nurtured many careers, including several such as Heather Harper, James Galway and Barry Douglas who later went on to be big names.

Havelock Nelson founded and directed the Studio Opera Group in the 1950s in Belfast in order to provide opportunities for local players and singers to perform major operas in English. Studio Opera laid the foundation for what later became Castleward Opera. He also directed the Ulster Singers from 1954. He was a frequent adjudicator at music competitions internationally and he has an extensive list of compositions and arrangements for orchestra, chamber ensemble, choir and voice, in addition to incidental music for some 150 radio plays and television films.

He was awarded an OBE in 1966 for services to music.

Eve O'Kelly

He wrote a book in 1995 of his life entitled "A Bank of Violets".



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