

FRANCIS CHAGRIN

Dr David C F Wright

Francis Chagrin was born Alexander Paucher in Bucharest on 15 November 1905 to a wealthy Jewish family. As his father was in the engineering business, young Alexander studied to be an engineer in Zurich but spent a lot of his time at the Conservatoire there learning music. He graduated in 1928 but his parents refused to support his taking up a musical career. He left home, went to Paris and changed his name.

It seems that his parents then had a change of heart but Chagrin turned down their offers and earned his way by playing the piano in night clubs and composed popular songs.

In 1933 he studied with Paul Dukas and Nadia Boulanger in Paris and this is why it is thought that some of his music has a French flavour.

He moved to Britain in 1936 and remained in the UK for the rest of his life. He would say that he was Romanian by birth but British at heart. He admired the musical scene in London and made a major contribution to it. He studied with Matyas Seiber, got married and had two sons, Nicolas and Julian who are both actors.

Julian was born on 22 February 1940 and is a mime artist and actor. He was the mime tennis player in the film *Blow-up* of 1966 and among his other roles are in *The Concert* (1974) and *The Money Spider* (1976). His brother, Nicolas, is probably better known. He has acted in *Hamlet* and television productions of *Great Expectations*, *Darling Buds of May*, as *Marcus Cope*, *The House of Elliott* and as *James Westbrook* in *Hollyoaks*, to name a few.

During World War II, Chagrin was musical advisor to the BBC French service for which he was decorated by the French government in 1948.

He was a versatile composer, excellent at light music and he wrote music for TV commercials for chocolate, soap, shampoo and tooth brushes. He composed for the *Hoffnung Festival* including his *Ballade* mostly in D major! His list of film scores probably reaches 200 or more including *Behind the Guns* (1940) *Helter Skelter* (1949) *Last Holiday* (1950) *Castle in the Air* (1952) *The Happy Family* (1952) *The Intruder* (1953) *The Beachcomber* (1954) *An Inspector Calls* (1954) *The Colditz Story* (1954) *Simba* (1955) *Charlie Moon* (1956) *No time for tears* (1957) *The Scamp* (1957) *Danger within* (1958) *The Snorkel* (1958) *Clue of the twisted candle* (1960) *The man who was nobody* (1960) *Marriage of convenience* (1960) *Greyfriars Bobby* (1961) *In the Cool of the day* (1962). He also wrote for *Volpone*, *King Stag* and *Danton's Death*.

Like Humphrey Searle, he wrote some music for episode(s) of *Dr Who* in 1964, the year after he was elected *Film Composer of the Year* and received the *Harriet Cohen* award.

He was active in the ISCM and supported the *Composers' Guild*. He was a very meticulous man and was witty and generous.

His 'serious' works are impressive and tonal. He was one of the very many 'conservative' composers supported and promoted by Sir Wiliam Glock at the BBC. Chagrin wrote a piano concerto (1948), two symphonies (1959 and 1970), the third remained unfinished, a *Romanian Rhapsody* for Larry Adler, *Aquarelles* for string orchestra, *Suite Medievale*, *Prelude and Fugue*, for the 1947 Proms, *Serenade* for wind quintet, *Four Lyric Interludes*, the *Sarabande* for oboe (or violin) and string orchestra and much more.

He died in November 1972 after a series of heart attacks, a few days short of his 67th birthday.

There is a CD of some of his film music on Chandos 10323 but we await a recording of the two symphonies and the piano concerto.

