



SPEAKING WITH SHADOWS

Transcript of Bonus Episode: A Wedding March by John Brocklesby

Josie: Hello! You've found a little bonus episode from our series Speaking with Shadows.

In our main programme we look at the stories that history forgot. I'm Josie Long, and today you can hear the full interview with Ruth Ecuyer from our episode about the conscientious objectors imprisoned at Richmond Castle. Ruth tells us the remarkable story of how one of those men later composed a wedding march for her.

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Ruth: In 1962, I was to get married to my Swiss-French husband, and we were to have a wedding blessing in the Methodist church in Muswell Hill, north London.

And while my mother was organising this, but she wanted me to choose the music for this occasion. And so I asked somebody who had figured largely in my childhood and family life. And that was another conscientious objector – absolutist – called Alfred William Evans, and he was my Uncle Alf. He was a piano tuner and very involved in music and loved music of all kinds. And so I wrote to him and asked him if he knew of a wedding march other than the ubiquitous Mendelssohn and Wagner, which I did not like at all. And unbeknown to me, he got in touch with his very dear friend John H. Brocklesby, who of course we all know was a most fantastic organist and musician of great talent.

And lo and behold Brocklesby, who was, unbeknown to me at the time, in the last months of his life, actually wrote a wedding march for me! And he sent this to my parents and included a letter to my father in which he says:

Dear friend,

My old friend and companion in troubles during World War I, Alfred Evans, thinks I ought to remember you but I must confess that my memory is a bit vague. I hope you will forgive this. However, when Alfred said your daughter wished for a change from the eternal Mendelssohn when her wedding is celebrated, and could I recommend anything, I had to confess that I knew of no serviceable alternative. I know that Novellos have been trying to launch an alternative, but I have not yet heard or seen it. So under the circumstances, I made the bold reserve of writing a march myself.

I cannot profess to compete with the great Felix, but the accompanying music is, on my wife's testimony, a jolly piece. And what else is required? I have done one thing that Felix, who wrote of some fairies in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, forgot to do: I have remembered the bride's mother, and possibly father too, in the tender section just before the conclusion.



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A wedding is not all triumphant. Some remember the breaking of one family that another may start; not all triumphant, but nevertheless all love, and love has its sadnesses at times.

I pray God bless you all and may this music bring its blessing.

Yours very sincerely,

John H. Brocklesby

PS I hope this is not too late!

But that was in May, 25th of May, and the date of the wedding blessing was the 30th of June, so he was well in time! But when you get married you have all sorts of things going on in your mind, and although I didn't read the letter immediately – my father didn't actually give it to me immediately – but I saw the music, and it was played by the organist at the church. And I remember thinking how beautiful it was, and how privileged I felt that somebody had actually – who didn't even know me – had actually written a wedding march for me. And today this feeling is amplified incredibly, especially since I know that he died only a few months after doing so.

So I feel that he has to be up there with the greats of the Sixteen, the Richmond Sixteen, and that his work – his gift to me – should be put that other people may enjoy, and realise that these men who tried so hard and suffered so greatly to make their point for what they considered was a human right, should be celebrated, even if you don't agree with what they do.

My husband and I have been members of English Heritage for quite a few years, and there was a very good article, quite lengthy, about the graffiti, in the English Heritage autumn magazine. And this article had been written by Megan Leyland. And reading this article, she had actually gone further with not just presenting the graffiti, but apparently the importance of this graffiti, and the men who had been there and what had happened – the terrible things that had happened to them. It wasn't just graffiti, it was so much more. So I sent an email to English Heritage and they were all very interested. That was amazing! I just found that totally amazing.

Megan had thought that the wedding march was worth recording again. My son, who is in this field of music, he said: 'Oh, I'll do that for you.' And so he has done this recording, which I wasn't expecting at all. It was a total surprise, a lovely surprise. And we have gone through the march – I have now obviously been able to listen to it a lot more and listen to what John Brocklesby was saying – and I believe that it is really a description of a wedding as opposed to a march as such.

My son and I have put it on a particularly relevant organ because John Brocklesby played such organs in his time, and the wedding march was written for the organ. But the actual happy bit which I feel describes the ceremony and the people coming in and all; and then you get to a bit which is noted as being slower and more thoughtful; and then it comes back to the happy bit; and then comes another different type of thoughtful bit. And then the ceremony goes on with the happy music and then gets to



the end. And as John Brocklesby himself wrote, this is where the thought for the parents of the bride and the family to be created and all that, comes together.

The first, what I call thoughtful but reflective bit, I thought sounded rather like the bridegroom expressing his desire to make this marriage and how he saw his vows. And then the second bit I thought sounded like the bride responding to that, and sharing her thoughts and her wishes probably for the future and all the rest of it. And so that is how we presented it, with the organ playing the happy bit, and the bridegroom being represented by some brass, and the bride herself by flute.

I would love John Brocklesby to have been able to hear it. I think he'd be quite pleased, and Alf as well. So I hope we've done a good job. They will hear what a deeply thinking man he was, because I think that comes over loud and clear. He really stuck to what he believed, in very difficult circumstances, even long after he had come out of prison – and the aftermath of these guys when they came out of prison was dreadful. They were vilified and not at all understood in any way.

I find it so touching that he wrote it, and I wonder whether something in his life meant that he possibly always wanted to write one. I don't know whether he had children or not, but he may not have had the occasion to write for them or whatever. And possibly – did he know that his life was coming to an end? I don't know. Maybe this was one of the last things that he wanted to do musically because it is so inspired. It has to be something like that, doesn't it? So I hope we've done him proud.

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Josie: Thanks for listening to this bonus episode of Speaking with Shadows. If you subscribe on your podcast app, you'll get the next one automatically. I'm Josie Long and you can find out more about this, and other amazing stories, at english-heritage.org.uk/speakingwithshadows.