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MEET A HEALER WITH PLENTY TO SING ABOUT

... and whose special talent is welcomed in Norwegian hospitals



Richardson in the lobby of the Ullensvang Hotel on the Hardanger Fjord during the 2017 annual music festival

THERE ARE so many highlights and achievements in Sybil Richardson's professional life as a singer that her curriculum vitae reads like a Who's Who of popular musical entertainment.

With Welsh parents, it was perhaps inevitable that when she was born in Liverpool she became part of a musical family whose favourite pastime was gathering around a piano and singing together.

She first performed on stage when she was only five years old and within 10 years was singing with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Junior Orchestra.

Before long she was working alongside the likes of Cliff Richard and Tommy Steele in ITV's 1950s *Oh Boy!* television series. She had become a member of The Vernon Girls, who at one time were a 16-strong ensemble making their own records as well as providing backing vocals to the top pop singers of the day.

After marrying writer, musician and impresario Terje Støm-Olsen, she moved to his home country, Norway, in 1961.

"That meant I missed working with The Beatles and some of the other exciting groups who began making a name for themselves in the 60s, but it also gave me an opportunity to move into classical music for which I had also had a love from my childhood."

Richardson embarked on 10 years of training in classical singing resulting in her joining Oslo Chamber Opera and, for 14 years, being a member of the Norwegian



Sybil Richardson giving healing (Photo: Photo: André Kirsebom, The Norwegian Spiritual Union)

“
My
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”

Opera Chorus.

Event management had also become a special focus, working not only for her husband but also for London-based Nick Grace Management International as their general manager and coordinator in Oslo, responsible for staging major musical events in arenas and stadiums.

For a decade, her role was to ensure that the talented visiting performers were comfortable and well looked after. "We often got invited to dinner with people like Dame Kiri Te Kanawa. It was a wonderful time," she recalls.

Still performing in cabaret, Sybil Richardson's own shows are likely to include songs made famous by Judy Garland and Vera Lynn, as well as classical favourites as part of a nostalgic musical mix.

In recent years her impressive vocal talents have extended her influence beyond entertainment and into therapy. Now, when she is not performing on conventional stages, Richardson is to be found exploring healing powers in traditional one-to-one sessions or by singing with groups of hospital patients. The results are often remarkable.

"It was important for me to study with teachers who were acknowledged and respected for their integrity and skills and to receive a healing diploma which gives both me and my clients a sense of security," she explains. "So I attended Norwegian Spiritualist Healing Union courses that have been accepted by the Norwegian Ministry of Health, and that accreditation gives us the opportunity to work in collaboration with medical doctors."

The opportunities to explore spiritual



Sybil Richardson with her husband Terje Støm-Olsen, wearing rosettes to celebrate Norway's National Day, 1998

dimensions in Norway have opened up tremendously in recent years and the Norwegian Spiritualist Church and the Healing Union celebrated their 10th anniversary in January this year with an evening of mediumship, healing and music at which Richardson performed [PN January 2017].

Her awareness of the influence of Spirit, which she first sensed in childhood but had suppressed, was reinforced by a strange experience soon after her husband Terje died at the age of 56, eight years ago. Having worked in lots of countries, he had written a book in his last years about his colourful life and experiences, to record and share those memories with his children and grandchildren. The book



Terje Støm-Olsen greets Princess Diana when she arrived in Oslo at his invitation to see the London City Ballet perform 'Carmen'

began with an architect's drawing of the house in which he was born.

"One night, soon after he died, I was watching a TV programme called *Haunted Houses*, which I'd never seen before, in which medium and channeller Lilli Bendriss goes into houses, describes the impressions or presences that she feels and attempts to clear them. And there, on the screen, was the house in Kristiansand, just down the coast, where my husband was born.

"I was very enlightened by the programme and decided to ring her to give her some more details about the house's history and a copy of the book. My husband's uncle, Kai, who had lived in the house, had been shot at the age of 22

by the Gestapo, because he was working in the resistance during World War Two. His mother had made a sort of sanctuary in the house, which no one was allowed to go into. It was possibly where she would communicate with him.

"There were a lot of strange things going on in the house, and his presence was just one of a number that she encountered.

"When I met Lilli and spoke about my husband being born in the house she said, 'Should we try to contact him?' And, being the excellent medium that she is, she did so.

"I was astounded by all the details and to learn he was still in the music world and was working on an incredible musical level with renowned composers of yesterday. I am eternally grateful to have been guided to her and to learn that a loved one was well and happy after so many years of agony and pain due to terminal cancer.

"My experience is by no means new, as so many people have to be literally pushed into a new awareness. I was overwhelmed and that triggered my interest in Spiritualism.

"I decided to put myself into the proper school to learn more about it. I searched on the internet and as soon as soon as I saw André Kirsebom's picture on the screen, I said to myself, 'That's him!' And I went to him directly."

We told the story of Kirsebom's spiritual journey from crime novelist to the establishment of the Norwegian Spiritualist Union, via the UK's Arthur Findlay College (AFC), in our January 2017 issue.

"Since then, thanks to André and various other people who are much more spiritually advanced than me, I have learned an enormous amount. And it's given me the opportunity to develop.

"I am only a channel; merely a catalyst for whatever happens after the initial contact with the client has been made, when other healing energy frequencies are activated by another form of higher energy.

"I am also deeply involved in the process of how music stimulates the subconscious mind, and its ability to reach beyond human verbal communication."

Richardson, like Kirsebom, attended courses at the AFC as part of her development, including working under the tutorship of medium and healer Simone Key, and is hoping to encourage others in Norway to follow her example.

"Group healing in hospitals with aged patients, people with dementia and Alzheimer's, is now my 'big mission,'" she explains. "It's not about curing them, of

course, but improving their life quality. Each therapy session lasts between 30 and 40 minutes, comprising well known songs, breathing exercises, gentle movements to music and visual contact with objects that jog the memory."

The project, which she calls "Breathe Out" because correct breathing is so important to wellness, is supported by the Norwegian Hospital Board. It was tested out at four different hospitals in "closed wards" for a period of four months, with two weekly visits to each hospital.

"The groups consisted of eight patients, both men and women. Two nurses from the respective hospitals attended each session and took notes and made observations. Incredible things took place during some of the sessions. Patients who had lost the use of speech jumped up and started to sing and I often got to dance, laugh and let go with a lot of them.

"At the end of the project, the evaluations were sent in to the hospital board and I received copies. What was so heartwarming was that *all* the hospitals had registered positive changes and that there was a more peaceful atmosphere among the patients. Many of the hospitals, who have their own activity staff, have adopted the therapy programme.

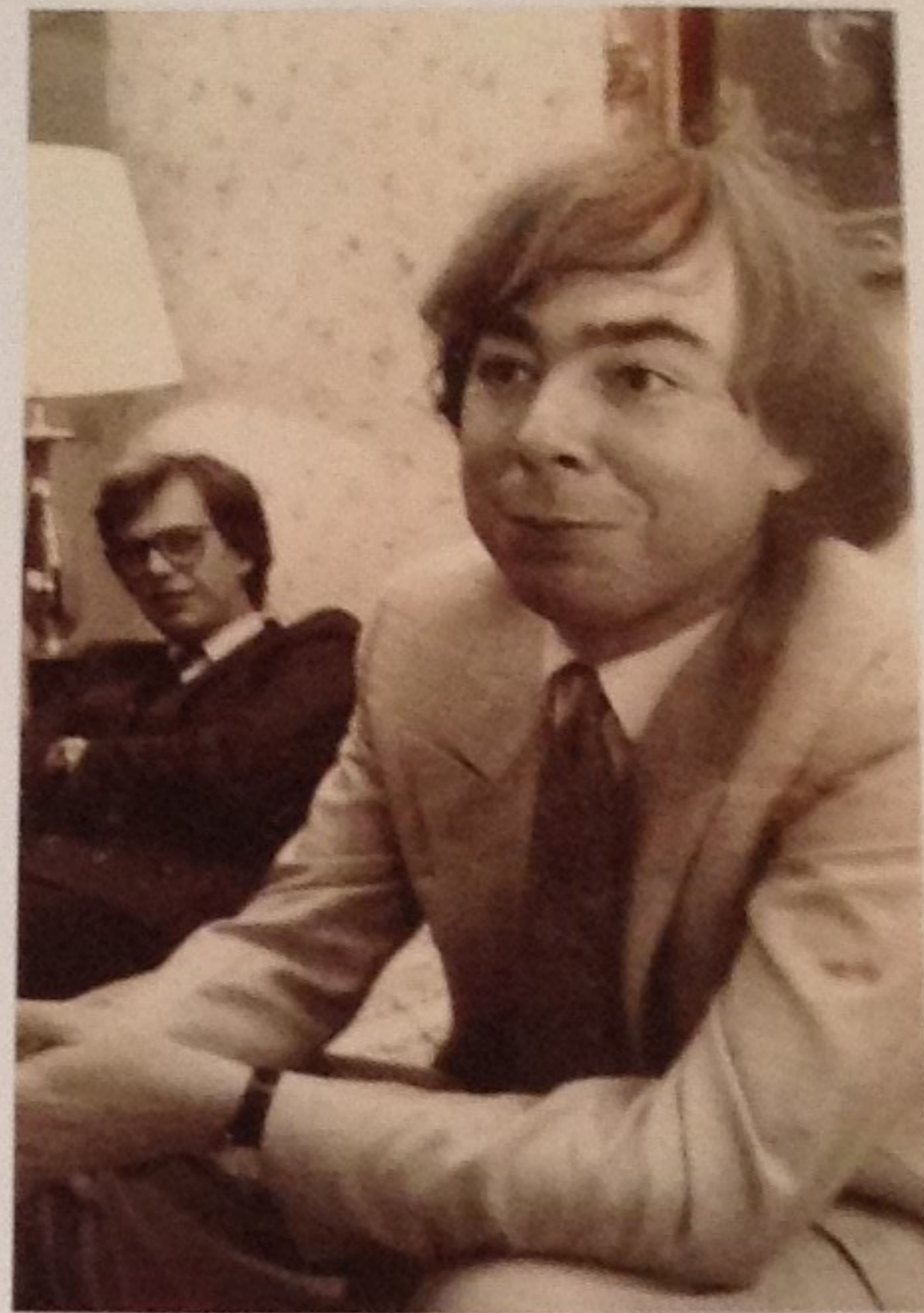
"There is still an enormous amount of work to be done, and in Oslo alone 80 per cent of the patients in hospitals and nursing homes are suffering from dementia and Alzheimer's, and the figures are on the rise. The interesting things about working with people with memory loss who live in an isolated world of their own is that it proves even more the combined power of music and healing."

Interestingly, Sybil Richardson uses English songs during her "Breathe Out" sessions because they are the ones she usually performs and also because she is not familiar enough with old Norwegian songs. Yet, astonishingly, most of the elderly patients are able to sing along, in English, to *Edelweiss* or – their favourite – *It's a Long Way to Tipperary*.

"They must have heard and learned those songs when they were very young, but they somehow still recall the words. It's amazing."

With experiences like that, it's hardly surprising that Richardson is delighted that "so many others are awakening to and practising the power of music and healing", adding:

"My deepest wish is to get as many as possible interested in this work and to try to convince the medical world of the benefits. I have been visiting hospitals and institutions since 2002 and I hope to go on forever." ■



Terje Støm-Olsen and Andrew Lloyd-Webber pictured in Stockholm in 1987 during one of their trips together to arrange large-scale productions of the English composer's award-winning musicals

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