

From Surrey to Switzerland and back

Label owner Nicholas Dicker talks to Gramophone about how Guild has returned to the UK



In November 1967 a half-page advertisement appeared in the back pages of *Gramophone* for Guild Records, 'The New Name in Quality Records'. It advertised the first three releases of 7-inch (vinyl) EPs of choral music from Guildford Cathedral and a recital disc played on the cathedral organ. The label was instigated by Barry Rose, who put Guildford Cathedral on the musical map as the first Organist and Master of the Choristers at the newly consecrated cathedral in 1961.

LPs followed the EPs and the label acquired a modest reputation with only five albums. Rose went on to even greater things at St Paul's Cathedral and then St Alban's Abbey, but by 1993 the record label had been bought by the Swiss businessman and entrepreneur, Kaikoo Lalkaka.

'Kaikoo was responsible for broadening the remit from British choral and cathedral music to much more commercial repertoire and launched two sub-labels, Guild Light Music and Guild Historical Recordings, carefully building the catalogue to its present size of over 600 releases', says Nicholas Dicker, the new CEO of Guild Music. 'With his Swiss connections, he also brought a raft of new recordings of rarely heard Swiss composers and performers, making the label a pioneer in bringing that country's musical heritage to a larger audience.'

Dicker's acquisition of the label was a result of many years' waiting for the right moment. 'I had known Kaikoo for several years through a mutual friend and was aware that at some point he wanted to retire. That point came in December last year and a deal was signed in March, bringing the label back to the UK in what amounted to its 50th anniversary.'

After university, Dicker's own career started at Saga Records in 1980. 'I was its last label manager, following in the footsteps of Martin Compton and Ted Perry, and it was still making analogue recordings in what was a burgeoning digital age, all with a budget of £500 per album! On many occasions I was not only engineer and producer but graphic designer, production guy and marketing man, so Saga certainly was valuable in giving me a complete grounding in how to run a record company – and indeed how not to.' When the owners closed Saga in 1989, Dicker went on to work for Start Records, then part of Pickwick, which marketed Vanguard Classics and in recent years has masterminded the reissue of much of the EMI archive on the audiophile vinyl label HI-Q. But taking on the Guild label was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

'Like many people, I had always been aware of the Guild label but when I began to study the catalogue, I was staggered at the range, quality and sheer quantity of the releases', Dicker enthuses. 'For instance, I had no idea of the treasures that lay in the Historical catalogue, with everything from the first complete recording of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* from a 1952 German radio broadcast with a young Leontyne Price, to rare recordings by Toscanini, Stokowski, Barbirolli, Kletzki, Munch and Cantelli, and Beecham conducting *Götterdämmerung*

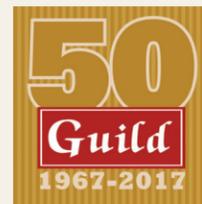
from Covent Garden in 1936! Then there is the extensive and imaginative Light Music catalogue, with its 'Golden Age of Light Music' series covering original recordings from the 1920s to the 1950s. But it is the main Guild label itself of which I'm probably most proud, with superbly engineered major productions often featuring British orchestras performing fascinating repertoire.' The label has world-premiere recordings of many Swiss composers, including orchestral and chamber works by Volkmar Andreae and a new three-CD set of the orchestral music of Caspar Diethelm for release this autumn. 'I am keen to maintain the Swiss connection', says Dicker. 'There is a wealth of material lying in the vaults of the Zurich Central Library and it deserves to be better known. It is a country that has nurtured some extraordinary talents.'

Not that the 50th anniversary has allowed Guild to forget its roots: 'There will be plenty of spectacular but contrasting organ recordings, from French Romantic repertoire with David M

Patrick at Coventry Cathedral to Bach's *Goldberg Variations* on the organ of St Katharina Church, Horw, Switzerland, played by Martin Heini.' Along with further releases planned in its well-respected Historical and Light Music series, Dicker is adamant to raise the profile of Guild: 'I want the label to become one of the leading independent players in the classical market, promoting niche repertoire and new artists, while at the same time catering for broad tastes, with something of interest for almost everybody. There is even some jazz and world music on our eclectic "ZahZah" label.'

But what about those inaugural EPs from Guild released 50 years ago? 'Most of the tracks are still in the catalogue!' laughs Dicker. 'Some we couldn't use because the tape had become damaged but what I did discover while going through the archive was an EP of choral music by Vaughan Williams, his motet *Valiant for Truth* and part-song *Silence and Music*, with The Proteus Choir of Guildford Cathedral conducted by Vernon Handley. Handley and Ursula Vaughan Williams wrote the notes and the cover was illustrated by Barbara Handley. It was recorded by Nicolas Ware in Guildford Cathedral in January 1969 and produced by none other than Barry Rose! To my knowledge it has never been reissued but it sounds quite beautiful. It is too short to issue as a CD, so we are going to offer it as a download via our website and the usual channels.'

So how would he sum up the label's philosophy? Dicker points to the first line on the website: 'Music's power in uniting people, enriching their lives forever, is the moving force behind each of Guild's releases.' 



Guild Music Limited

Celebrating 50 years

email: nicholas@guildmusic.com
phone: +44 (0)20 8404 8307
guildmusic.com



Two session photos from the forthcoming three-CD set of Caspar Diethelm's orchestral works, with (above) Rainer Held conducting the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. The recordings took place in September 2016 at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. The recording crew included (top, l-r) assistant engineer Phil Hardman, Rainer Held (standing), producer Michael Ponder and Esther Diethelm, the composer's daughter

TOP 10 GUILD RECORDINGS

The Organ of Coventry Cathedral
GMCD7801
David M Patrick plays an exciting recital of French Romantic organ music ranging from Vierne's *Carillon de Westminster* to Guy Weitz's *Symphony No 1*.

Bach's Goldberg Variations
GM2CD7805
A different take on a familiar work: Martin Heini plays Bach's *Goldberg Variations* on the delightful organ of Horw Church, Switzerland.

Sir Malcolm Sargent conducts Rachmaninoff
GHCD2423
This superb recording with the LSO under Sargent has Cyril Smith performing Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto and the composer's Third Symphony.

Leopold Stokowski
GHCD2426
'I don't think I can imagine a more exciting end to the Shostakovich Fifth Symphony than this one' - BBC Radio 3's *Record Review*, 2017. Live recordings.

British Cinema & Theatre Orchestras
GLCD5108
By the time the 20th century dawned, an orchestra 'pit' below the footlights was a part of stage and screen. This CD reminds us of some of the top orchestras.

Holidays for Strings
GLCD5189
The emphasis in this collection is on strings, although in the interests of variety the other sections of the orchestra also get their opportunity to shine.

100 Greatest American Orchestras – Part One
GLCD5230
For years virtually every US city had its own orchestra – often subsidiaries of 'classical' orchestras, dubbed 'Pops' – while others were film orchestras.

Haydn and Schubert Masses
GMCD7104
Haydn's *Nelson Mass* and Schubert's *Mass in G* beautifully performed by the Choir of St Paul's Cathedral, directed by Guild's founder, Barry Rose.

Noël nouvelet
GMCD7314
'Noël nouvelet' is a vibrant mix of traditional carols and exciting arrangements of familiar tunes, blending seasonal tradition with innovation.

Massenet Songs
GMCD7393
Best known for his operas, Massenet composed concert suites, ballet music, oratorios, cantatas and over 280 songs.