

## **The Countess of Munster Musical Trust**

The Trust was founded in 1958 by Hilary, Countess of Munster.

Born Hilary Wilson, her father inherited the prospering Wilson Shipping Line, whose business was originally founded on iron ore imports from Sweden in the days of the Industrial Revolution.

Hilary was an only child, shy and retiring, but with a passion for music and she devoted herself to the piano. Custom of the day precluded her entering music college but she had private lessons with the great Solomon and gave recitals and played in hospitals during the First World War.

In 1928 she married Sir Geoffrey Fitz-Clarence who in the same year inherited his uncle's title of 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Munster. They had no children, which was a great sadness to the couple.

Lady Munster continued to perform in hospitals and schools and her commitment to music was total. Her home in Bletchingley, Surrey, was a hub of musical activity and she was a great patron of many professional musicians.

Through the guidance of her close friend, Gerald Coke, a financier and supporter of music, the concept of the Trust was born and her desire to help young musicians was put onto an enduring and practical basis.

The Trust's role was to support young musicians of professional potential to achieve their aims, by funding their fees and living expenses and also by underwriting concerts for promotional purposes. Now a well-established part of the classical music world, its existence and the help it provides makes a very significant contribution to the advancement of talented young musicians.

In the 60s and 70s, the Trustees became ever more aware of the lack of professional playing opportunities for young musicians and they initiated concerts with the English Chamber Orchestra under Raymond Leppard (who was himself a Trustee in the 60s and 70s) for the benefit of young soloists. From these beginnings grew the Recital Scheme and its success was immediate and lasting. The benefit of the Scheme is dual, not only do the young musicians experience the professional platform and become known to audiences throughout the country but the music clubs also benefit from the introductions to talented young musicians and also the sponsorship the Trust provides.

The Trust is unique in the provision of independent resources and expertise to identify and help those with the greatest talent and need. Maintaining the support the Trust has provided for more than 50 years is critical to the future of the musical life of this country's own young talent. The spirit which Lady Munster inspired still survives and the strong sense of her original concept renews itself in all who become involved with the Trust.