

John Joubert: 1927 – 2019

by Chris Bye

John Joubert leaves an auspicious musical legacy which will forever echo around the world's churches and concert halls. Born in Cape Town, the composer's childhood years were dominated by an enthusiasm for art. Initially, Joubert had set his sights on being a painter, though an increased interest in music led to a change in his professional ambitions in favour of the latter.

Joubert was educated at the Diocesan College (widely known as 'Bishops') and studied with W H Bell at the South African College of Music. In 1946, a Performing Right Society Scholarship enabled Joubert to study at the Royal Academy of Music in London under Theodore Holland, Howard Ferguson and Alan Bush, and was awarded the Lionel Tertis and Royal Philharmonic Society prizes. During his studentship at the Academy, Joubert enrolled as an external student at Durham University, graduating with a BMus in 1950.

1951 saw the completion of *Torches*, arguably his most enduring carol; it was written for a primary school choir in Hull of which his wife was the director. Another early success was his opera on George Eliot's *Silas Marner* (1960), which was intended for the golden jubilee of the then Union of South Africa; it was ultimately produced under the auspices of the University of Cape Town. The Sharpeville massacre of 21 March that same year led to the composition of the Second Symphony (1970), dedicated to the memory of those killed on that day by the police force of the Apartheid government. The Symphony, which is inspired to some extent by Shostakovich's Eleventh, bears a passage from Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) on the score.

As an educator, Joubert held posts at the universities of Hull and Birmingham, retiring in 1986. The following year marked the beginning of Joubert's work on his opera *Jane Eyre*, which was reworked prior to its production in 2016. Prolific in his output, the composer completed eight other operas during his lifetime, as well as five Concertos and (in total) three Symphonies. Works of consequence for keyboard instruments include three Sonatas for Solo Piano, and the towering Passacaglia and Fugue for Organ (1961).

John Joubert is survived by his wife Mary Litherland, their daughter Anna (a cellist) and son Pierre (a violinist).

John Pierre Herman Joubert, composer. Born 20 March 1927, died 7 January 2019.