

# The Revd Ronald Corp

LIZ ARTINGDALE

*The Revd Christopher Smith writes:*  
WHEN I told people that I was about to move to be Vicar of St Alban's, Holborn, the clergy knew the parish well enough, but musician friends recognised the name of the non-stipendiary colleague I was about to inherit: Ronald Corp, conductor, composer, priest, and all-round good chap. He turned 60 that year, 2011, and conducted a big celebration concert in the Festival Hall, to which we had a parish outing. The *Church Times* ran a piece on him at the time, and regular readers of this paper will have seen his articles and reviews over the years.

The name Corp, Fr Ron maintained, was derived via French (*corbeau*) from the Latin word for raven (*corvus*). That story was the way in to a sermon on one occasion, and he had something of a gift for a natty image with which to engage his audience. People liked Fr Ron, and he made them feel valued, made them feel special. The personality was warm, and it was slightly vulnerable.

He was born and brought up in Wells, a west-country man, which was just evident in his voice when you listened carefully, and he went to read music at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1970. When he went down, he obtained a post as librarian to the BBC Singers, and, in due course, he became choirmaster of both the Highgate Choral Society and the London Chorus.

In 1988, he founded the New London Orchestra, and put together programmes of music that was regarded as unfashionable at the time. Some of that, though by no means all, was the "light-music" repertoire for which he was perhaps best known, and he recorded a tremendously popular set of CDs for Hyperion in that genre. There was an inclusiveness about his choice of programming which says something about the character of the man.

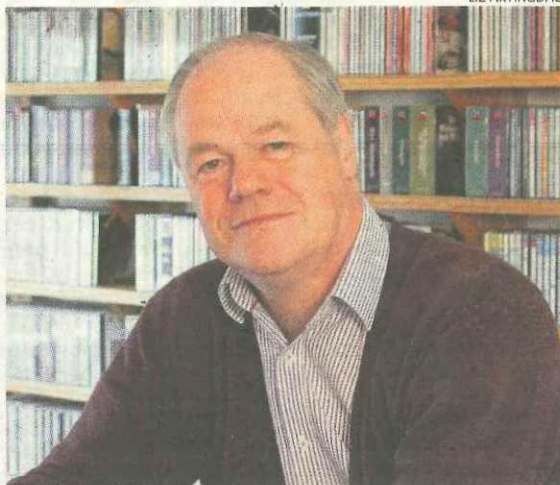
Meanwhile, Fr Ron was working away at composition. He had been composing since he was at school,

and kept at it through the years. Again, the breadth of styles was impressive, and he had a great burst of compositional energy when the restrictions of 2020 and 2021 were in place. He leaves us with plenty of music for choirs, but also chamber music and symphonies.

And he did not fight shy of setting challenging texts, as with his recent setting of some letters written from a Jewish grandmother, Leonie Rabl, who would eventually die in Auschwitz, to her family, safely exiled in London. *Letters from Lony* seems almost unbearably sad as I listen to it now, and it was influenced, I suspect, by Britten's chamber music. The work will be performed on 1 August at the Three Choirs Festival this year, in the presence of Lony's grandson — whom she never met — to whom a number of the letters are addressed.

Ronald was the author of *The Choral Singers' Companion*, which came out in 1987 and ran to a third edition, and he founded the New London Children's Choir in 1991. It was choral singing that brought him to St Alban's, Holborn, in his early twenties, where he was drawn into the choir by the then organist, Michael Foley. As one of our long-standing singers put it, "Before long, Michael invited him to conduct something, and it was immediately obvious that he was very good at it." Our choir library also benefited from some cast-off scores from the BBC Singers.

In due course, he moved on, and found his vocation worshipping with the then Fr Peter Wheatley (who later became Bishop of Edmonton)



at St Mary's, Kilburn, was trained on the Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme, and was ordained deacon in 1998 and priest in 1999. He moved to be non-stipendiary curate at St Mary's, Hendon, in 2002, and then came to work with my predecessor in Holborn in 2007.

This is, then, a story of twin vocations, musical and priestly. In both, he was generous with his time and energy, and it has been sad to see that energy drain from him in recent months. He had been ill for almost a year, with a condition that never seemed to be properly diagnosed. Then, at Easter, he had to have some surgery, and complications around that brought about his untimely death.

Fr Ron was in some ways very open, in others very private, and supremely confident on the podium, but sometimes rather less so in church. He was appointed OBE for services to music in 2012, but, perhaps, was less acknowledged as a musician than he ought to have been. He will be very much missed, both in church and in the musical world. May he rest in peace.

*A requiem mass for the repose of Fr Corp's soul will be offered in St Alban's, Holborn, on Friday 6 June, at 7 p.m.*