

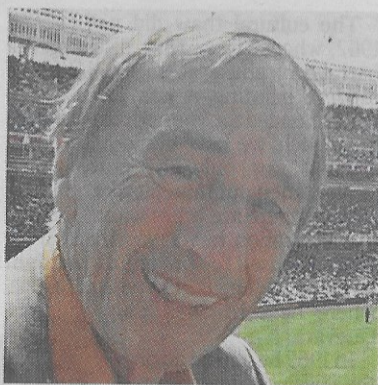
Terry Harrison

Ebullient classical music agent who presented the skull of one of his famous clients to the Royal Shakespeare Company

Greater love hath no agent than he arrange for a client's skull to be removed after his death and presented to the Royal Shakespeare Company. Not only did Terry Harrison do just that before the mortal remains of the pianist André Tchaikowsky were fed into Oxford crematorium in 1982, he also championed the skull's appearances on stage long after his client had stopped paying commission.

Harrison's approach was never about his percentage. He represented a select group of classical musicians in whom he believed, championing them with irrepressible enthusiasm to orchestras, festivals and record companies. Whatever time of day or night, whatever the emergency, Harrison was there. He helped the Soviet conductor Kirill Kondrashin to settle in the West after his defection in 1978; and he shaped a career for the pianist John Ogdon, who suffered from mental illness.

However, it was his work for Tchaikowsky — even while the eccentric musician was comforting Evelyn, Harrison's estranged wife — that was extraordinary. The pianist was challenging at the best of times. Traumatized by a childhood spent hiding from the Nazis, Tchaikowsky would renege



Terry Harrison and, right, David Tennant with the skull in Hamlet

on engagements and change his programme with little or no notice.

Tchaikowsky died in June 1982 having named Harrison as his literary executor in his will, which also stipulated that his skull should be offered to the RSC. The funeral director thought it would be illegal, but the Home Office decreed that it was permissible and, with only hours to spare before the cremation, Harrison found a medical team willing to undertake the procedure. It took two years to dry out and then

could only be used with a licence from the Human Tissue Authority.

Terence Brian Harrison was born in Sheffield in 1937. His father was a bus driver and his mother a seamstress, but times were hard and he recalled eating custard and chips with his younger brother. Young Terry's fine singing voice soon became apparent and he moved from his local church choir to Sheffield Cathedral, where he became head chorister. He left school at 15, did his National Service with the army in Germany and then landed in London.

To make ends meet he worked at a bank in Swiss Cottage while looking for a job in classical music. One of his customers was the wife of a pianist represented by the agency Ibbs and Tillett. She arranged an introduction. Taken aback by Harrison's blunt northern approach, Emmie Tillett, the managing director, turned him down.

Some months later she had a change of heart and invited Harrison for a second interview, noting in her diary: "I think he may fit in... very keen on business." He joined the company in the autumn of 1965, taking a substantial pay cut in the process. He was joined by Jasper Parrott, the Cambridge-

educated son of a British diplomat.

Within four years Harrison and Parrott had tired of Mrs Tillett, and left to set up Harrison Parrott, a boutique agency. Instead of acting as a clearing house for a hundred or more musicians, they provided a high level of personal management to a dozen clients, including André Previn and Vladimir Ashkenazy. Mrs Tillett's view of their defection was that while she "expected such behaviour from Harrison, who is from Yorkshire, she did not expect it from Jasper with his family background".

In 1988 Harrison and Parrott parted. Parrott retained the company name, expanding into an ever-bigger opera-

tion, while Harrison continued to offer personal management to a handful of musicians. He was soon supported by Helen Turner, his partner of the past 25 years. She survives him with their son, Toby, who is a student. Harrison worked from their home in Oxford, where he ran a small antiques business on the side. He remained a lifelong supporter of Sheffield United and had a distinctly individual sense of style.

For many years Tchaikowsky's skull was used only in rehearsals, but in 2008 David Tennant held it during 22 performances as he delivered the line, "Alas, poor Yorick!"

Latterly Turner ran the business, Harrison Turner, on her own as Harrison succumbed to vascular dementia. When she closed the company in 2015, the pianist Andrés Schiff paid tribute to his former agent's work, saying: "In a musical era now dominated by commercial values and tasteless publicity, he has been like a breath of fresh air."

Terry Harrison, classical music agent, was born on August 26, 1937. He died from the effects of vascular dementia on January 23, 2017, aged 79

