

## News Glyndebourne's George Christie dies



Glyndebourne Festival Opera is mourning the loss of its elder statesman, George Christie, who has died aged 79. Born in 1934, he was the son of Glyndebourne founders John Christie and his wife, the soprano Audrey Mildmay.

Sir George took over the estate and the running of the festival in 1962 after his father's death, and over the next four decades transformed it from an intimate, almost niche event into an international festival.

He set up Glyndebourne Touring Opera and encouraged the development of education and outreach work. In 1994, at a cost of £34 million, a new opera house was opened, replacing the tiny original and enabling a much wider audience to have

access to the Festival.

In 1999 he handed over the running of the opera house to one of his three sons, Gus Christie, but has remained a beady and enlivening presence at every festival since. George Christie was knighted in 1984 and made a Companion of Honour in 2001. He died after a long illness. His wife, Mary, survives him.

Below is a personal tribute from the tenor **Christopher Gillett**, currently preparing for a role in *Der Rosenkavalier*, which opens the 80th season next week.

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'I arrived at Glyndebourne this morning to the news that Sir George Christie, erstwhile owner of the house and supremo of the festival for nearly 40 years, had just died. There was no announcement that I heard, just the passing of the sad news from one of us to the next. It's a tight and close community down here so many of the permanent staff were visibly upset; sometimes it's easy to forget that as well as a superb opera house this is also the Christie home. George seems to be in the very fabric of the brickwork. His life was Glyndebourne and Glyndebourne was his life.'

His son and successor, Gus, says that he had spent his father's last night with him, listening to a recording of Act One of the 1965 festival production of *Der Rosenkavalier*. It's the very same act that is being rehearsed on stage - with the orchestra for the very first time today - while I type this. In professional theatre the show goes on, even when there's a death in the family. I have no doubt George believed this and would be happy that we continued to work to uphold his extraordinary legacy, the rich music of his beloved Strauss filling the opera house he built and so dearly loved.'

**[Read Christopher Gillett's regular blog from Glyndebourne \(/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/glyndebourne-1\)](/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/glyndebourne-1)**.