

GEORGETOWN CHORAL SOCIETY SET TO DO REQUIEM

A Requiem from the composer of *Cats*, *Evita*, *Starlight Express*? The change of direction is less violent than it might appear at first sight. In many ways this *Requiem* marks for Andrew Lloyd Webber a return to the musical surroundings in which he grew up.

School was at Westminster, just across the road from London's Houses of Parliament. Tradition closely linked the school to Westminster Abbey itself and in Lloyd Webber's day attendance at certain church services was obligatory. But, even more important, the Abbey was there at hand with occasions that were not obligatory for the Westminster pupils. Lloyd Webber recalls going to the impressive memorial service held for Ralph Vaughan Williams and also, as a thirteen-year-old, crossing the Abbey yard through a thick fog for the first London performance of Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*, probably the last major, popular piece in the oratorio tradition to have been composed in England.

The influence of the Abbey was there and so was that of Lloyd Webber Snr. He was an organist, not far away at All Saints, Margaret Street, and at the Central Hall, Westminster, as well as being a composer of sacred music. Some adolescents might have rebelled. Lloyd Webber,

on his own admission, preferred to absorb, and the power of the past lingers on. He still enjoys "popping into evensong" and his main interest outside music is architecture, and especially church architecture. Now there is the *Requiem*.

Two events set the *Requiem* in motion. The first was the death of Andrew Lloyd Webber's father in 1982 and the second was a story about Cambodia in an obscure corner of the *New York Times*, concerning a boy who was faced with the choice of killing his mutilated sister or being killed himself. Cambodia has no musical influence on the score, but it did give Lloyd Webber the idea of scoring the *Requiem* for a boy, a girl and a man: In other words, treble, high soprano and tenor. He toyed with including a bass, but soon rejected the concept. The choral writing is strictly along cathedral lines, but Lloyd Webber, with an impish grin, admits that it might not always be academically correct -- "My father insisted that I should not be over-trained musically."

How "theatrical" does Andrew Lloyd Webber reckon his *Requiem* to be? There are, after all, good precedents. It is the commonest criticism of the world's most famous *Requiem*, Verdi's which was also inspired by a

death, that of Alessandro Manzoni, Italian poet and patriot. "Let's say there is an imprecise theatrical structure concerning the boy and the tenor, and the girl, who is the bridge between them." The presence of Placido Domingo as the tenor suggests that the *Requiem* will also be described as operatic. "Maybe. But as far as I'm concerned it's the most austere piece I have written so far. What excites me is writing for the operatic voice, whether Placido's or Sarah's (Brightman), because you have almost another octave to play with, and all the attendant melodic possibilities.

The first draft of the *Requiem* was heard during the 1984 Sydmonton Festival, the Berkshire site where Andrew Lloyd Webber tries out most of his major new works before taking them away and polishing them. That polishing took a further half-year, probably the most concentrated and lengthy period of work Lloyd Webber has given to any of his compositions to date. Nothing has been allowed to distract from the *Requiem*.

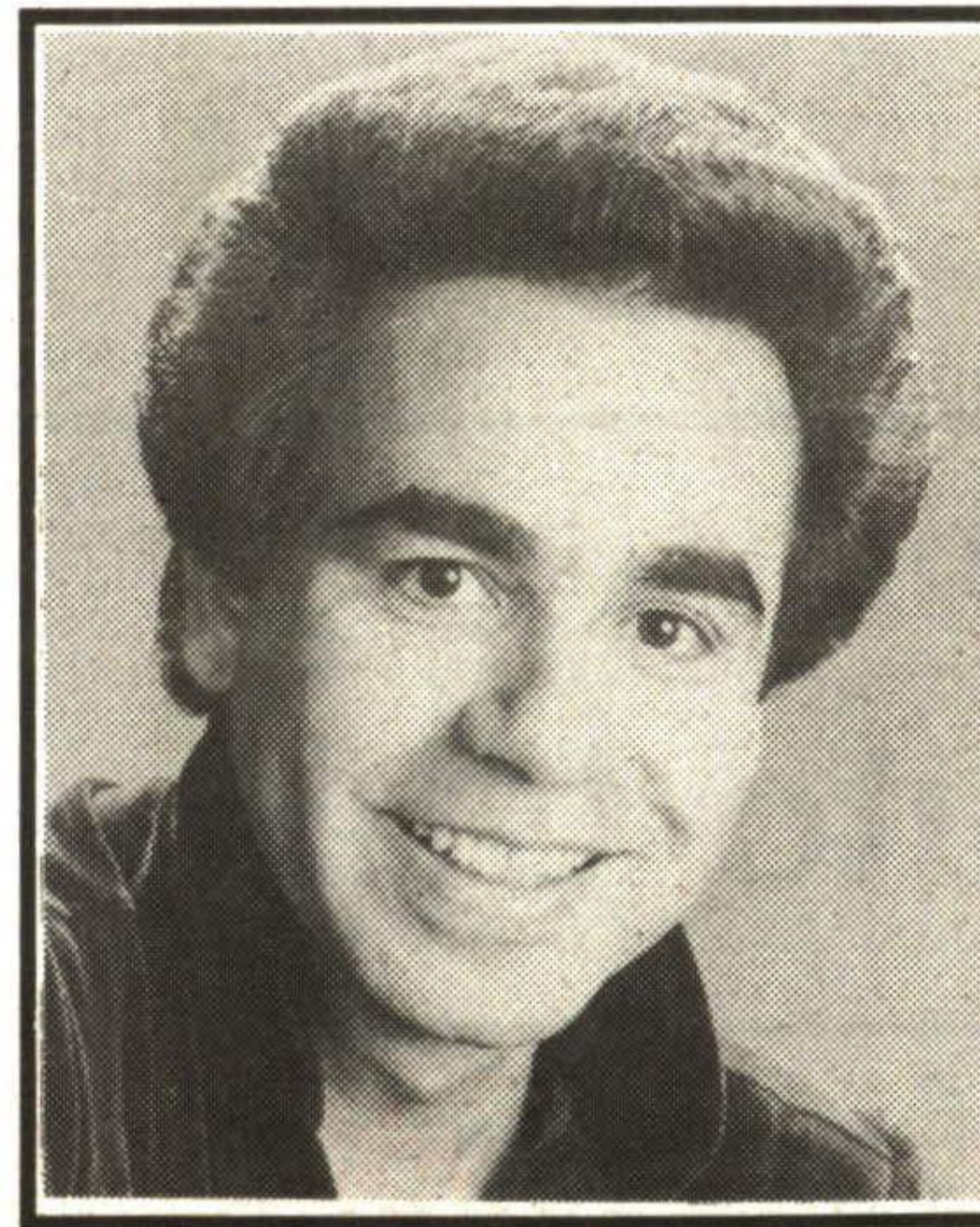
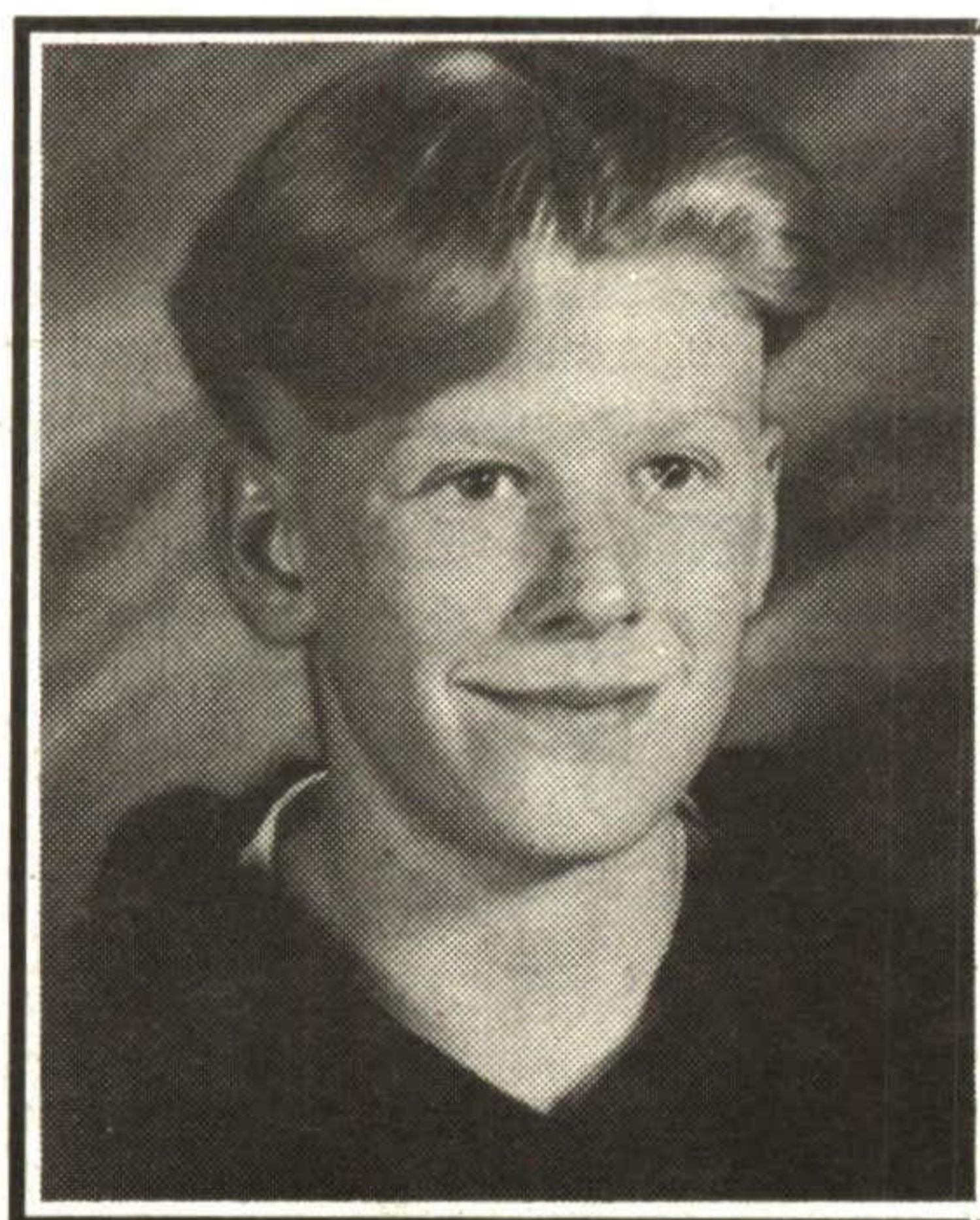
And now that it is complete, what is his own verdict? "I don't know what place it will find in the music of today but to me it is the most personal of all my compositions.

John Higgins, 1985

The GEORGETOWN CHORAL SOCIETY

Conductor **A. Dale Wood**

presents



ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER'S

REQUIEM

with orchestra and other choral works

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