Following the death of Sir David Willcocks on 17 September, TRBC Principal Conductor Brian Kay writes:

The death of Sir David really does represent the end of an era and of a life which touched countless singers all over the world who, like me, will always remain profoundly grateful for his inspirational leadership. My personal debt stretches all the way back to 1962 when he appointed me a Choral Scholar in his choir at King's College, Cambridge and it is fair to say that everything I've been lucky enough to do in my working life has stemmed from that moment and from the rarefied privilege of singing in that wonderful choir for three years under his outstanding direction.

His many Christmas carol arrangements – known and loved wherever people get together and sing – are touched with genius; but it is surely as a choral director of immense distinction that he will be remembered most, by the vast numbers of people who have had the good fortune of falling under his unique spell. There simply has never been anyone quite like him.

The miracle, whereby he and Don Monro were able to inject new life into The Really Big Chorus and Concerts from Scratch, and then to develop them over so many years, has given incomparable joy in singing to so many. And his influence on generations of choral directors has been and will remain incalculable, something to which I, and many like me, owe more than we can say. His Presidency of the Leith Hill Musical Festival was always filled with enthusiasm and encouragement, knowing as he did how vitally important choral singing is in the lives of all those taking part.

And while insisting on the highest possible standards of disciplined singing at all times, he did it with good humour, always hoping to draw the best possible sound and a true sense of togetherness and purpose out of vast numbers of people, somehow managing to make singers believe that they had achieved something way beyond what they thought was possible. Yes, there was an iron fist in the kid glove, but that unforgettable smile of encouragement was always there. For him, music-making was the greatest pleasure and he showed us all how to share in the peculiar rewards of choral singing, at the same time as responding – in a state of awe and respect – to his own innate brilliance.

We shall not see his like again but we must all remain deeply thankful for the special way in which he enriched our lives through inspiration, dedication and devotion to the cause of music and for his tremendous gifts of communication. I would like to think we singers are all better people for having been able to share in his long and remarkable life.

Concerts from Scratch THE REALLY BIG CHORUS