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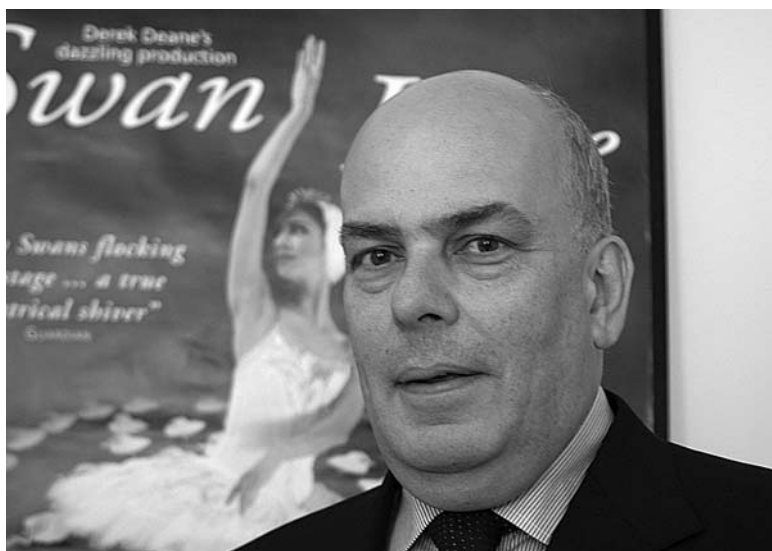
Raymond Gubbay

Founder of Raymond Gubbay Ltd

Concert promoter Raymond Gubbay got his first taste of the performing arts as a child, when his grandmother started taking him to the local theatre on Saturday afternoons. 'Every week there was a different show. We used to sit in the gods for half a crown', he says.

Gubbay also got an early introduction to classical music at home although he did not appreciate it much at the time. 'My mother was a very good pianist and my dad played the violin so there was always music in the house', he says. 'I failed miserably at Piano Grade One and I tended to think it was all rather boring. But clearly it rubbed off on me a bit.'

Brought up in Golders Green, north London, he left school at 16 to be an articled clerk in his father's accountancy firm. But he soon realised it was not for him. 'It was a complete disaster', he says. 'I was just not interested in it. After eight months I was six months behind with the correspondence course. I had to leave because I couldn't stand it.'



His father helped him to get a job at Pathé Newsreel, but he did not excel at that either. So his father introduced him to Victor Hochhauser, a concert promoter who specialised in putting on performances by Russian folk-dance and ballet companies. After an interview that consisted of just three questions – one of which was, ‘Can you start on Monday?’ – Gubbay was given the job of taking folk-dancing companies on concert tours round the country.

After 10 months, however, he decided he had learnt enough to become a concert promoter himself. He had no money apart from £50 his father lent him, but he formed a group of three freelance singers and a pianist and wrote to dozens of theatres and concert halls across the country trying to get bookings for them.

Fortunately, Gubbay’s timing was spot on. The government had recently appointed its first arts minister who was encouraging local authorities to promote the arts and build concert halls. So virtually every town was looking to put on some form of municipal entertainment. Gubbay’s first event

was a Gilbert and Sullivan evening at the Theatre Royal in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. It was a big success and he was soon putting together other groups of singers and booking them on tours round the country. By the age of 20 he had 150 bookings a year.

There was, however, the occasional mishap. When one of his groups was supposed to be performing in Nottingham the dates got mixed up. He says: 'I had this phone call at seven o'clock in the evening saying where are you? But we were in London. About three hundred people had to be given their money back.'

As interest grew, Gubbay formed the London Concert Orchestra from a group of freelance musicians and started putting on concerts in London's newly opened Festival Hall and Queen Elizabeth Hall. But the real turning point came when the Barbican Concert Hall opened in London in 1982. Gubbay says: 'That was a big milestone. Virtually every performance was sold out because people wanted to go and see the Barbican and to hear the kind of vocal and orchestral concerts I was putting on. It was wonderful.' In the first year of opening Gubbay held 50 concerts there, and by the second year that had risen to 130 dates and he was credited with helping to save the Barbican during its difficult early years.

Gubbay also started putting on exhibitions at the Barbican in collaboration with the organiser of an antiques fair. By 1988, however, the business climate had become a lot tougher, so he decided to sell his entire company to Emap for several hundred thousand pounds, staying on as managing director.

Emap decided to stage the opera *Turandot* at Wembley but while it was a success with the critics, the public stayed away. Gubbay says: 'I remember going to the boardroom afterwards and saying, well, there is good news and bad

news. The good news is that we have lost under one million pounds. The bad news is not by much.' Three years later, he bought his company back from Emap – for £1.

It was an inspired move. He says: 'Buying it back for £1 was the best bargain I ever had. We had had all the disciplines of a publicly quoted company imposed on us, so we were able to run the business in a really efficient way. Turnover went up substantially, and we suddenly found we were making decent profits.' The company quickly created a niche for itself in the market, with shows such as the Classical Spectacular concerts which it puts on twice a year at the Albert Hall, and by 2004 had a turnover of £18 million. The company now puts on 600 performances a year, including concerts, ballet and opera.

Gubbay, 62, is thick-skinned about critics who dismiss his concerts as populist and lightweight. 'The critics can be very snooty, but at the end of the day it is about pleasing

Fact File

Date of birth: 2 April 1946

Marital status: divorced with two children

Highest level of education achieved: secondary school

Qualifications: five O levels

Interests and hobbies: living in France (has Paris flat and house in Provence), spending time with grandchildren, French wine, art

Personal philosophy: 'I never forget that there are many more important things in the world than show business.'

the public, because they are the ones who buy the tickets', he says. 'I put on the things that I like and I seem to be in tune with what a section of the public likes, and I think that is important. There is a place for everything. I am motivated by seeing an audience enjoying themselves. It gives me a great buzz.'

In 2008 Gubbay sold 75.1 per cent of the business to German entertainment company DEAG in a deal which valued the company at around £10 million. Gubbay has agreed to stay on as executive chairman for three years and still owns around 20 per cent of the business. He says: 'Although I had no idea of selling the company and the offer came as a complete surprise, it was a deal I couldn't refuse. My Mum and Dad would have been very pleased to see how far their original £50 had gone to help me.'