

## Many Nights at Many Proms *by Joan Black*

You may raise your eyebrows when I tell you I attended my first Prom at age 8 – with an escort 27 years my senior. No, not a dancing type Prom – didn't even know what a Graduation celebration Prom was – never heard of 'em. Nevertheless, it was definitely a dress-up affair although we rode atop a double decker bus, not a Limo, to reach our destination.

The occasion was my 8<sup>th</sup> birthday and my Pop decided I was of an age to enjoy a Beethoven Concert so he took me to hear the London Philharmonic Orchestra play Symphony #6 (The Pastoral Symphony) at The Queen's Hall in London.

Since 1895 monthly concerts had been staged at The Hall to, in the words of the Founder, 'educate the Masses to the finer aspects of music by offering free concerts where people may wander around (in other words, 'PROMENADE') and eat, drink and smoke while listening to 'good' music' i.e. NOT Music Hall type songs! So began the very popular series of PROM Concerts and 'The Masses' (politically correct speech for 'POOR PEOPLE'), graduated to 'anyone who appreciates The Classics but cannot afford the Snobbery attached to being gowned and Top Hatted and arriving in a horse drawn carriage' – Symphony Concerts and Operas having been the privilege of the so-called 'Upper Class' .

As time went by, ticketed chairs were provided for those who preferred to sit and a charge was made to 'Promenade', but still within reach of the wallets of 'The Masses'. And so almost 30 years after the very first PROM, I attended MY very first Prom – and did so on a regular basis until 1946, even as the bombs fell and ack-ack gunfire often drowned out the music and we took refuge under our seats as pieces of the building flaked off around us. The Symphony Concerts continued at The Royal Albert Hall after The Queens Hall finally was destroyed during the great fire bombing of London in Sept. 1940, and when The Royal Albert was damaged, the music transferred to The Bedford Corn Exchange just a few miles outside London. Nothing was going to stop those immensely popular PROMENADE CONCERTS. I learned to love music during my 13 years of attending those PROMS. Most girls have fond memories of just ONE PROM – I can recall DOZENS!