

THE brothers Lloyd Webber – composer Andrew and cellist Julian – could scarcely be better known. But who is this William featured on a new album with them?

A richly orchestrated piece, *Aurora*, written by William Lloyd Webber, is given its world premiere recording alongside Andrew's *Variations*, now in symphonic rather than rock form. Both are played by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Lorin Maazel – with Julian on cello, of course.

William, generally known as Bill, was their father: organist, composer and director of the London College of Music, who died in 1982 feeling perhaps a little overshadowed by his prodigious progeny.

Another lesser-known Lloyd Webber – Bill's widow, Jean – makes no secret of the fact that her husband for 40 years occasionally had mixed emotions about their talented sons.

"It was a slightly tricky situation because one side of him was absolutely delighted and proud of them. The other side was a slightly envious one, thinking 'Oh Lord, they have more drive to them, they are more single-track minded.' I suppose he felt he had not achieved all he might."

Living in a mansion flat in South Kensington (across the corridor from Julian), Mrs Lloyd Webber senior displays the unworldliness of an Oxbridge don.

Two Burmese cats share – indeed rule – her home. There are pictures of cats all around – plus cat books, cat ornaments, even cat coasters, souvenirs of her son's hit show *Cats*.

A sticker on her door urging the cessation of acid rain denotes an affiliation to Friends of the Earth. At 64 she still cycles and teaches piano to children – what she called "Mrs Thatcher's disease" affects her little fingers and rules out adult pupils.

Such admirable worthiness is accompanied by an unself-conscious frankness. Bill,

Lynda Murdin on Lloyd Webber senior

BILL AND SONS



FELINE FRIEND: Jean Lloyd Webber with one of her cats

she revealed, "would never hear a word against the sons – he thought Julian's performances were superb and adored Andrew's first nights. On the other hand, quite often some person would come up to him and say, 'You must be so proud' as if he had done nothing himself. That was like a red rag to a bull."

She added: "People can be extraordinarily unkind and extremely insensitive at times. If you are sensitive you can collapse under it; if you are like Andrew you probably become more aggressive and batter through. Probably Julian could, too – but Bill couldn't."

Bill had, in fact, done rather a lot himself. From the age of 12 he was a "brilliant" organ scholar and then a teacher. He composed prolifically, was organist at

the Central Methodist Hall, took up directorship of the London College of Music in 1964 and greatly expanded its facilities.

"In a way maybe his talents were too diffuse – nowadays everything is so specialist," said his widow thoughtfully.

Aurora was one of the first pieces he wrote after the war, which he spent in the Army pay corps, and it sounds at times as if this church organist was interpreting decidedly unecclesiastical activities.

The composer himself wrote that it conveyed the idea of the Roman goddess of dawn dispersing the dews of morning: "This short tone poem attempts to portray, in reasonably respectable sonata first movement form, the inherent sensuality of her nature."

Mrs Lloyd Webber agreed it was especially "luscious" and redolent of 1950s film music. "He could have written for films. He was a curious man, he liked his routine in a way. The thought of being on a film set at 5am with people he didn't like the look of didn't appeal to him at all. I believe he turned a film down."

Whatever his disillusionment, he was, she stressed, "a very, very talented man". With this new album the sons have worked together so that he may achieve posthumously at least a little of the fame that largely eluded him.

And another such exercise is planned with a whole range of music by William Lloyd Webber. It will include piano pieces played by John Lill, a family friend, several songs and "a rather splendid *Mass*" completed in later life when he again turned to composing.

Mrs Lloyd Webber described her husband's style as "very strong – one feels it's English but there are things – Rachmaninov, Delius possibly. There's something about his writing that if you get to know him well you say, 'Oh yes, that's Bill.'"