

Basingstoke Concert Club Newsletter – 2007

Basingstoke Concert Club is proud to launch its 2007-08 Concert Season, with six concerts from outstanding musicians and a masterclass by international pianist, Bernard Roberts.

Subscription tickets for all 6 concerts and the masterclass are only £68! A big saving on the individual ticket prices. See the brochure for full details.

You can buy your tickets from Bridget Tivey on 01256 328589 or James Graydon on 01256 780785. Or on the door at concert nights – join us on Saturday 6 October for our first concert.

All concerts are at Trinity Methodist Church, Sarum Hill, Basingstoke, and start at 7.30pm. Free parking is available nearby from 7pm.

You can find out more about our concerts at our website:
www.basingstokeconcertclub.org.uk.

We look forward to seeing you – enjoy great music with us!

We are very grateful to Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council for funding our website development.

Basingstoke Concert Club is Registered Charity no. 269555

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Chairman's Reflections

I hope you all enjoyed our last season as much as I did. I was struck by how, at each concert, people came up to me and said they thought this was the best concert yet! I hope that means we pleased lots of people, most of the time, with our programme – and provided new insights into chamber music for you. We have another exciting and varied selection for you: opening with a quintet, closing with a quartet, and all variations in between!

We are delighted to have Bernard Roberts, our President, giving our Celebrity Concert on 27 October. Bernard is also joining us in a new venture for the Club, a masterclass for piano, to be held that afternoon. I hope you will support us and encourage the pianists you know to come along, as Bernard will be giving wonderful insights into improving one's playing. We have heard how magical his masterclasses have been elsewhere and hope to share that with you in Basingstoke. Bernard sends best wishes to the Club and reports that he is recovering very well after his recent illness. We continue to wish him very well too.

Another new offering will be the Family Concert on Sunday 25 November at Central Studio with the Sacconi String Quartet. This builds on the past success of the Fun Days, which were set up by Derek Scholfield. Derek stood down from the Committee this season after many years of hard work for the Club, for which we are very grateful. He can now relax when he comes to the concerts!

Many thanks to our contributors for their articles – it is good to see how much musical knowledge and experience we can call on to keep chamber music excellent in Basingstoke.

Sarah Denly Ball (Chairman)

“A verbal art like poetry is reflective;
It stops to think. Music is immediate,
It goes on to become.” W.H. Auden

A Question for Conductors

“The problem with young conductors today is that they don’t know where they stand in relation to the conductors of the past.” That was the essence of a remark made by pianist Llyr Williams to our burgeoning conductor colleague, Luke Aldworth Davis, who ponders its implications here....

In writing my dissertation, on the use of string vibrato in orchestral music, I have come to realise something of what Llyr meant. The 20th century has seen many changes in orchestral performance, one of the most obvious being the seating of violins. Placing both 1st and 2nd violins to the left of the conductor replaced the antiphonal seating to satisfy the demands of recording. As Ernest La Prade wrote in a 1935 edition of *Music Educators Journal*, the new seating meant that the violins were no longer in the least efficient area in relation to the microphone and therefore the balance between wind and brass could be more easily altered.

It seems incredible that a change made for purely technical reasons has become the standard seating arrangement for a modern orchestra. In seating the student orchestra I conduct in this way, I came across many who felt it was foolhardy with such young players. Nevertheless, one only needs to look at the dialogue in the first movement of Mozart’s Symphony No.35, “Haffner” to see what is lost by not separating the violins. An even more striking example is the beginning of the fourth movement of Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No.6, “Pathetique”. The melody is shared between first and second violins, a note at a time. Each part leaps between melodic notes and harmony notes, making the score rather tricky to decipher at first sight! Nevertheless, this creates an incredible stereophonic effect which is entirely lost with the ‘modern’ seating.

Thankfully, many orchestras have returned to the antiphonal seating for certain repertoire, probably as a result of the greater acceptance of the ‘Historically Informed Performance’ (HIP) movement. This has had many more implications than just seating, such as the use of vibrato. Whilst this article is too short to attempt opening the ‘vibrato’ can of worms, it has been interesting to see what historical evidence actually backs up the claims of the most zealous proponents of the HIP movement.

Whilst the HIP movement has done a great deal of good and opened up interesting debate on performance practice, the danger comes with the use of morally-laden terms. The very idea that music 'should' sound in a particular way immediately inhibits the artistic freedom which has thrown up such notable performances in the past. Richard Taruskin wrote at great length on this subject in his *Text & Act* of 1996, in which he claims the HIP movement belongs not to any previous period but to the post-modern age.

Another tradition we seem to have lost in the 20th century is flexibility of tempo. During the course of my dissertation, I have looked at recordings by Wilhelm Furtwangler and one is immediately struck by the sheer excitement a flexible idea of tempo can provide. This tradition goes back at least into the 19th century, as can be seen in Richard Wagner's *On Conducting*, and I see no reason to assume that this tradition was an overnight invention. Far from the performances of Furtwangler and Celibidache, we seldom see structural fluctuation in tempo in orchestral performances these days. This is probably due to changing fashions in performance styles, the loss of long-term conductors and the substantial reduction in rehearsal time available. Whatever the reasons for the loss of such traditions, I cannot be alone in thinking it would be a terrible shame if they are allowed to die out, together with the diversity of performances. With the limited repertoire programmed by the larger, struggling concert halls, perhaps chamber music will provide us with the ideal platform for continued interesting, varied performances.

Luke Aldworth Davis

Cornish Perspective

Over now to our talent-spotting scout, and shrewd observer of all matters musical, Martin Fisher.....

I saw Britten's *Turn of the Screw* in 1979 with Felicity Lott (swoon, swoon!) and Welsh National but was still unprepared for the power and theatrical brilliance of the recent Glyndebourne Touring Opera version, which happily reached as far west as Plymouth. An absolutely wonderful staging and production with excellent singers, particularly Kate Royal in the Lott role of the Governess. The production will tour again though Ms Royal's presence is less certain – in the meantime her career has 'taken off'. Don't miss it even so.

Roderick Williams is a baritone I've got excited about before in these letters. His second Naxos recital of **Gerald Finzi** (8.557963) includes a real rarity, an early song cycle with string quartet (no piano) called *By Footpath and Style*. Williams believes it deserves much wider recognition, though in fairness I should add that Finzi's biographer Stephen Banfield finds 'lack of musical

clarity' and 'emotional inarticulacy'. As usual with Finzi it sets Thomas Hardy, though the disc also contains a piano cycle setting mixed poets, *To a Poet* Op13a, as well as the pinnacle of his Hardy settings, the cycle *Earth and Air and Rain*. Sadly, it looks as if Naxos has exhausted Finzi baritone songs now, so they'll have to find a tenor to match Williams for the rest of his cycles which won't be easy.

While on singers, I mentioned in a previous letter a promising young soprano called Rachel Nicholls. I thought she was a very good traditional-English lyric soprano but I was badly wrong – she is a truly amazing singing actress as well. This first became apparent in a late-night St Endellion Festival song recital where her Britten/ Auden *Cabaret Songs* had all the audience at her feet. Well, the *male* ones anyway, particularly when she asked us all to 'Tell me the truth about love'... This impact was confirmed in what should have been a very 'refined' recital of baroque arias by Handel, Cavalli and the like. But she transformed everything she sang, and saw nothing wrong in jumping onto a front-row seat to make a dramatic point in Purcell's *Mad Bess of Bedlam!* I don't usually like obvious 'acting' in songs, but Ms Nicholls overcomes all my purist objections.

Last time, I mentioned a forthcoming disc of the **Rawsthorne** quartets played by the Magginis. It's now out and well worth its price – Naxos 8.570136.

Another excellent Naxos is the viola music of **Rebecca Clarke** (1886-1979), a pupil of Stanford who spent much of her life in the US. Her Viola Sonata has been spoken of as *the* masterpiece for that instrument, and first impressions say that this could be right. There are lots of smaller works on the disc too, all completely non-'squeaky gate' in idiom but interesting nonetheless (she gets as far as polytonality for those who don't think 'pupil of Stanford' is a sufficient recommendation!). A particular lyrical highlight is a setting of the Scots tune 'I'll bid my heart be still' (1944). The violist is Philip Dukes, on 8.557934.

I've very much enjoyed hearing the sadly-departed Lindsays in **Haydn** Op 77 on ASV – this pair of quartets might be my 'one CD only' desert island choice. A little Googling will often find you good bargains on Lindsay discs: their Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert are all pretty safe recommendations. One good result of their break-up is that their cellist Bernard Gregor-Smith has now joined the Dante Quartet, who run an excellent mini-festival near Launceston, just a couple of miles from me. Expect true edge-of-seat excitement from their **Janacek** quartet disc due out from Hyperion – I've heard them do no. 2 live and can't wait to hear no. 1.

Martin Fisher

Pianist Shura Cherkassky ('Rubber Fingers'), like his approximate contemporary Artur Schnabel, acted as a magnet to Wigmore Hall aficionados. Far from condemning his impish tinkering with a composer's intentions, Cherkassky's public loved it and called for more! The Wigmore Hall, along with many other musical providers of today, has instituted its own '**Wigmore Hall Live**' CD label, and already listed in its fledgling catalogue is an archetypal 1993 Cherkassky recital. Featuring a delightful Haydn sonata, and several well-loved works by Chopin, punters shouldn't be dissuaded by the inclusion of less mainstream fare from Rameau, Hindemith and Lennox Berkeley. Rather, succumb to the persuasive advocacy of the pianist's magic fingerwork. The last billed item, Liszt's 2nd *Hungarian Rhapsody*, while setting out in decent sobriety, then gathers momentum in escalating waves of jollity to ultimately bring the house down. A gentle encore of Tchaikovsky's *Autumn* calms the audience on its way. WH LIVE 0014. Ring the Wigmore Hall direct on 020 7935 2141. And don't forget to ask for their catalogue, which contains several CDs of like stature – particularly the Nash Ensemble on top form.

Coincidentally as I write, the pianist playing Moussorgsky's *Pictures* with great bravura on Radio 3 is my next subject. He is the young (ish) Scot, **Steven Osborne**. Hopefully, some members may have heard some of his broadcasts live or recorded from the Edinburgh Festival. Last year (2006), Hyperion brought out a CD of Osborne playing the **Debussy *Préludes***. The listener doesn't need to be a musicologist to become conscious of the painstaking preparation behind this performance. I cannot do better than paraphrase an observation by the pianist himself: '*Les sons et les parfums* contains in three pages no fewer than twenty tempo-related instructions. The challenge of translating all this into something that sounds completely natural is prodigious, but when one finally manages to assimilate all these little nuances, it points towards a wonderfully subtle sense of ebb and flow that is innate to Debussy's music'. Amen to that. From the magical delicacy, and indeed sadness of *Des pas sur la neige* to the riotous *Feux d'artifice*, this is a CD you could not possibly regret buying. CDA 67530. Members who have difficulty with Messiaen (and I admit to being one of them) should turn to Osborne for enlightenment.

Beethoven's life was at a low ebb in 1818 when he was composing the 9th *Symphony*. The soles of his shoes were reportedly so worn that he could not go out of doors. Yet at the same time he was also composing his greatest piano sonata, **the *Hammerklavier***. "There you have a sonata which will make the pianists work" said Beethoven, and indeed most artists shelve it, at least from public view, until their maturer years. Not so the young French

pianist **François-Frederic Guy**. For him, the Hammerklavier is a love affair. He has performed it over sixty times in public, and on listening to his second CD recording of the work, one does indeed become aware of his technical fluency in tackling Beethoven's formidable obstacle course. This leaves his mind free to try and make some sense of the vast tonal structure of this work, and the result is very compelling.

There can never be a definitive recording of such a complex work – as Guy himself points out – but his CD, which came top in a recent BBC 'Building a Library' programme, can certainly hold its own among such heavyweights as Gilels, Serkin and Schnabel. NAÏVE 5023. Incidentally, Brahms lovers (is anyone not?) might be interested to know that he was the proud owner of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* sketchbook and quoted Beethoven's opening fanfare motif in his first Piano Sonata. He also quoted some of Beethoven's rising and falling thirds motifs in his fourth Symphony.

So moved was Joseph Stalin on hearing a particular Mozart Piano Concerto played on the radio that he demanded a recorded copy be made available to him. The orchestra acquiesced. So too did the pianist, Maria Yudina, but not without penning him the following note: 'I was glad that you asked me to play for you, Piano Concerto by Mozart – my always favourite thing. It shows that you do have *some* human qualities, and I will pray for you all my life, to save your black soul.' Not only was Maria spared retribution for this outspoken remark, but her disc was found on Stalin's record player at the time of his death.

I mention this because the music was Mozart's *K488 in A major*, and never have I heard an account of the Adagio as moving as Yudina's; not, that is, until I heard **Imogen Cooper's new CD with the Northern Sinfonia at the Sage, Gateshead**, which shares in its wistful beauty what one might imagine as a holy balm descending on the soul of all those murdered by Stalin. Imogen's disc, highly praised by the *Gramophone* magazine, also features Mozart's *Piano Concerto K271*, the *Jeunehomme*, performed in the words of the critic 'with an exhilarating range of colour and dynamics'. It receives 'Editor's Choice' status. AVIE AV2100.

Which opera has three titles & four overtures? The answer is, of course, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, or *Leonore* as he originally wanted to call it. Contention arises when performers (such as Furtwängler) choose to insert the substantial *Leonore 3 Overture* as an extra before or during the last act. Those against this tradition argue that the off-stage trumpet fanfare, announcing the timely arrival of the virtuous Don Fernando at the climax of Act 2, is surely less effective if we've already heard it in the Overture!

Nowadays, most performers simply preface the opera with Beethoven's final and shortest overture, the *Fidelio Overture*. Not as dramatic as *Leonore 3*, but fine in its intended role as a curtain raiser.

This is the format chosen for Sir Colin Davis's most recent live recorded performance at London's Barbican, which has caused quite a stir in the musical firmament. A stir because Sir Colin always sees his career as 'work in progress' – constantly refining aspects of interpretation. Mostly this is to our benefit, but occasionally he adopts a feather-like touch to what traditionally have been fairly weighty passages, and it doesn't quite fit the Beethoven we're used to! But overall it would be a heart of stone that remained unmoved by a performance of this great opera reflecting Colin Davis' unquestioned sincerity and imagination. The respect he commands from the LSO and its chorus is palpable. A strong cast list is headed by American soprano Christine Brewer as Leonore, who puts in a very creditable (unofficial benchmark) 'Abscheulicher' (Monster!). The originally notorious acoustic of the Barbican has been tamed these days – and the sound is of a high standard. **Colin Davis's *Fidelio*** comes as a 2 x CD set with comprehensive notes and libretto at around £11. LSO LIVE. LSO 0593.

Julian Woodward

Stephen Dodgson's String Quartets

Basingstoke Concert Club's first commissioned composer, Stephen Dodgson, has just had Volume One of his String Quartets released on the Dutton CD Label. Players are the Tippett Quartet, singled out in 1999 by the respected Park Lane Group as exceptional young artists. Included here are Quartets Nos. 1,5,6 and 7. Members who revere the string quartet medium, and we know there are plenty, should very seriously consider acquiring this CD. There are no squeaky gates, gratuitous atonalisms or extra-curricular helicopters – just pure music in imaginative patterns of rhythm and colour – pleasing to both the intellect and the ear. Intonation and ensemble are out of the top drawer, as is the technical quality of the recording. DUTTON CDLX 7182.

Julian Woodward

June 2006 Crossword Winner

Our congratulations to Doreen Tosswill, who has received £10 in book tokens for the first correct solution “out of the hat” to our June 2006 crossword. Other correct solutions were received from Susan Johnston, Mrs. M. Comer, Bob Atkins and Anne Monger. “Sergei” or “Sergey”, both authoritative spellings of Prokofiev’s first name, were accepted.

Cavatina Chamber Music Trust

You may have noticed that all young people under 18 and students under 22 may attend our concerts free of charge. This special support comes with our thanks to the generosity of the Cavatina Chamber Music Trust. Cavatina aims to bring chamber music to young people, and young people to chamber music.

This season we had 34 free-entry registrations from our young audience, which is a shade down on last year. This is such a pity and a trend we want to reverse, for two good reasons: firstly, these young people represent the chamber music audiences of the future and what pleasure it will give them; and secondly, for every young person who attends, the club receives £5 from Cavatina. So do please encourage any young people you know to come along.

The Club is proud of its role as a venue for musicians at the start of their careers and the next season has some fabulous examples, just the thing to show other young people that chamber music is actually rather “cool”. I’m thinking here of O Duo, who appeared last year at Newbury Festival – amazing drums, percussion and marimbas – they don’t stand still for a moment, such is the energy of their performance. And also Laura Lucas and Robin Green; we see that Laura already has rather a following from her website, so check her out there!

Cavatina is also funding the Sacconi String Quartet to play for our Family Concert on Sunday 25 November, at 3pm in the Central Studio, QMC. This is aimed at children aged 5-12 and their families. It is our first venture in this field since our Fun Day series ended – please help us make it a sell-out!

Other generous and much-appreciated grants have been received from Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council (for our website) and the Batty Charitable Trust. We await the results of an application to Hampshire County Council.

Hazel and Lawrie Shaw

Please Help Us Find New Sponsors

Funding is always a challenge for voluntary groups like the Club and during the last season our Sponsors and Friends have been very generous – many thanks to you all. Yet we always need to do more to balance our books. We do this by trying to increase our membership sales (40 new subscribers would be a dream come true! Please spread the word about our concerts to your friends) and by finding new sponsors.

Sponsors are not easy to come by: they need to get value and raised profile from their investment. Since Classical Music may not appear to be exactly popular taste, perhaps they may not feel affinity with it. Yet **our loyal sponsors, Air Products plc, Melville Burbage Insurance Services Ltd and Dawsons Music, clearly feel there is benefit in supporting a local club which aims to bring affordable, excellent music to people of all ages.**

We know a number of local companies have an interest in the arts (eg. De La Rue, Eli Lilly, Linde Material Handling, Macmillan and Wella, were supporters of the Haymarket Theatre). It is always helpful to have contact with a concert club member who has links with a potential sponsor. This person may know the right department, or even person, to contact and can help explain to them the immediate benefit of the sponsorship, which includes benefit to their own past or present employees, the most valuable form of local community support. They also raise their profile as a local community supporter.

So if any of you work, or have worked, for a company or any other local organisation, which you think could benefit from offering support to their employees and the wider community through us, then please contact me by phone or email. Our sponsors usually offer around £500 per year, although anything from £250 is gratefully received, particularly if they can make a commitment for several years.

Remembering that the hire of a piano for one concert can cost up to £1,000, explains the reliance we place on sponsorship to enable us to offer affordable tickets to all sections of the local community.

I will be pleased to discuss and follow up any leads or other suggestions which you have, so do contact me with your ideas.

Adrian Furtado, Sponsorship Secretary
adrian.furtado@btinternet.com or 01256-361940

Don't forget to make the most of other local music events over the summer, while you wait for the next Basingstoke Concert Club season to begin. Here is an excellent example:

**Bramley and Little London Music Festival 2007
St James's Church, Bramley, Hampshire**

7.30pm Thursday 12 July

Matt Butchers *organ*
The Royal Academy Brass Quintet

7.30pm Friday 13 July

Evelina Puzaitė *piano*
Derek Welton *baritone*

7.30pm Saturday 14 July

The Rosina Trio
Luisa Rosina *clarinet*
Helena Roques *violin*
Toms Ostrovkis *piano*
Liesje Blaxland-de Lange *harp*

Bookings/information

Anthony and Wendy Peagam
Park Gate Barn, Bramley Corner, Hampshire RG26 5DJ

T: 01256 881552

E: anthonypeagam@btinternet.com

Tickets/discounts

3 nights £8 per ticket; 2 nights £10 per ticket; 1 night £12 per ticket.
Cheques payable to Bramley PCC.

LAST WORD.....

Don't forget to book your subscription ticket for membership of the Basingstoke Concert Club. Where else can you hear such wonderful music performed by inspiring musicians and learn more about chamber music? Here are the dates for your diary:

Saturday 6 October –

7.30pm - New London Chamber Ensemble

Saturday 27 October –

2.30pm – Masterclass with Bernard Roberts

7.30pm – Celebrity Concert – Bernard Roberts

Sunday 25 November –

3pm – The Sacconi String Quartet - **Family Concert** at Central Studio

Saturday 1 December –

7.30pm – Eclipse Baroque Fusion

Saturday 19 January 2008 –

7.30pm – Laura Lucas and Robin Green

Saturday 16 February –

7.30pm – O Duo

Saturday 8 March –

7.30pm – The Doric Quartet

Meanwhile, have a lovely summer!