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Mission Statement

The Orchestra exists to serve the local community and to provide a forum for all musicians who enjoy playing in an ensemble. We welcome opportunities to perform locally in aid of community causes.



Conductor's Podium

It's funny sometimes how things work out the way they do. Some events are meticulously planned, while others happen organically, more by chance than by foresight. I would say we employ a mixture of these approaches in organising our programme, which I'm sure many of you will think explains a lot about certain aspects of our decision making.

Our inclusion of Grieg's *Piano Concerto* in our spring concert resulted from a slightly strange set of circumstances. It is a piece I have wanted to do for a very long time but had dismissed as an option given that there was no obvious soloist available. Then we were asked if we wanted to buy up some pieces in a library that was being sold off and, while we didn't get all the sets we had requested, we did get the Grieg. So we now had the music but still no sign of Eric Morecambe. Then in February last year, I went to a 'bring and sing' Mozart *Requiem* and, minding my own business during a break, some chap wanders up and says, 'You don't know me but I've got a picture of you hanging on my wall at home'. It was David Bonser who, already acquainted with artist Kate Davis and a keen musician, had snapped up Kate's sketch of me conducting (yes, odd choice). We obviously got talking and I found out that David was a bit of a pianist. Well, it didn't take long until I had broached the subject of the piano concerto and David had given a provisional yes. Move on a few months

Articles or feedback can be submitted to the Editor by email: helenandpeteharvey@btinternet.com or find me, Helen Harvey, in the cello section at rehearsals.

and I bumped into David again, this time at the Alton art exhibition. By then, he had taken a closer look at the piece and the provisional became a definite yes.

All we needed to do now was to work out the minor detail of how to play the piece. For this, we have progressed from the previous haphazard arrangement to something a good deal more organised. David has been learning the piece while I and the orchestra have been trying to get to grips with the basics of playing the notes. I then braved the wilds of Haslemere to meet up with David and his Steinway Model B to discuss the piece and make a start on giving each other cues at the critical moments.

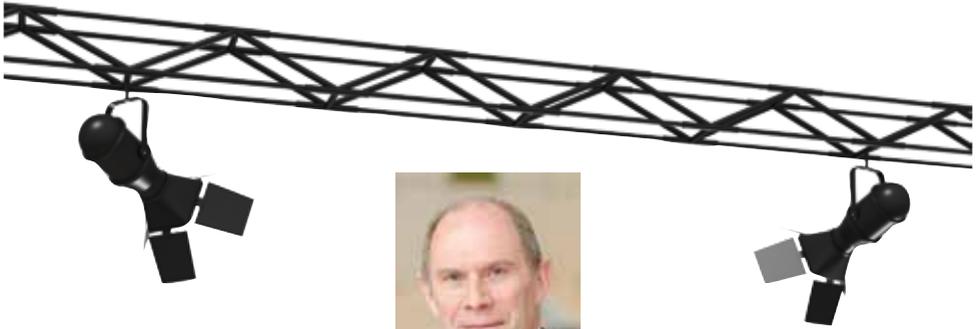
Working with a soloist is always a challenge for a conductor (and vice versa). The soloist is working on putting on a stylish individual performance and wants the band to come in at the right time, at the right tempo and at a volume that embellishes, not one that swamps. For the soloist (and I expect the orchestra) the conductor is just an intrusion, far more likely to mess up a classy performance than to create one. For the conductor, however, the soloist is a maverick, prone to add in a flourish just at the wrong time and disrupt an otherwise masterful control of the accompanying ensemble. (I will never forget the extra bar Jonathan threw in to keep us on our toes when we did the Tuba concerto and remain ever grateful to the editor for her alertness to the situation and salvage skills.) Getting it together is easier said than done, not least because both conductor and soloist suffer from being human beings, mixed with the ever present risk of fallibility in the orchestra (ed. surely not). Which is why we practise and why David and I are trying to identify and shape the moments when a nod or a flick are required and how to tell the difference between the intentional and the panicked look. And that's just between him and the first violins.

One reason I wanted to do the piece is because it kept me company when I was away from home for the first time on a six-month stint in France. Having listened to it so many times, you would think I would know it inside out, but this counts for very little when it comes to actually performing the piece with real people, everyone with their own interpretation of their individual parts. David will perform his own Grieg *Piano Concerto* – we must listen and help him shape it the way he wants it to go. There will be no formula and I fully expect there to be moments in performance when the words *pants*, *flying* and *seat* will come to mind. We should allow for these moments; indeed we should prepare for them because half the fun of working with a soloist is that, no matter how meticulous the planning, we can't say for sure what's going to happen. We just need the assurance that when it does, we go with it and allow the organic to win over the organised. So, we need a bit more time to work out the cues, feel the rubato, sense where endeth the glissando so that, when it comes to it, David can perform and we can accompany. Provided he plays most of the notes in mainly the right order, we should be fine.

David Budd



Spotlight on...



David Bonser

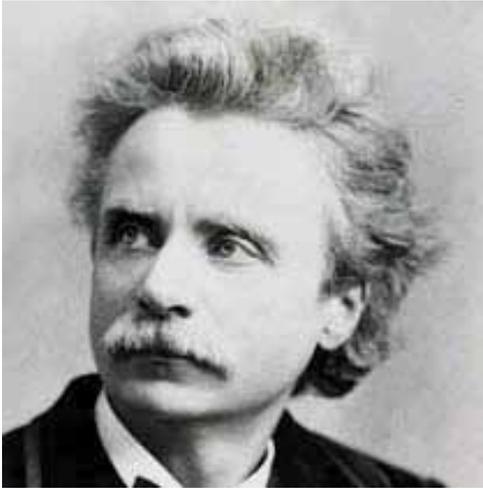
I was brought up in Fleet, Hampshire learning to play both the piano and cello and also having composition lessons for a year from Jonathon Harvey who was composer in residence at Southampton University. As well as the usual music exams and Festivals, I played in a piano trio with two friends that gave me a taste for chamber music. In my last year at school I was fortunate enough to be soloist with the Hampshire Youth Orchestra. Despite all this music, I did science A levels and then studied engineering at Trinity College, Cambridge.

Following University I joined the nuclear industry in the North West of England and alongside the first couple of years of work I studied piano with a teacher from Cheetham's School of Music and gained a performer's ARCM. The next 40 years were taken up with my engineering and business career in nuclear energy although I did manage to squeeze in running a choir, learning how to play the organ (with uncoordinated feet!), writing pageants for local communities, accompanying singers and instrumentalists, etc, etc. But increasingly the time demands of my job meant that I was not able to take part in things with others and so for about 20 years I only played the piano for myself as relaxation.

And then, four years ago I retired from paid employment and have been able to recover some of the piano technique I had in my twenties. I am also able to indulge my love of accompanying and playing in chamber music groups.

I jumped at the chance offered by David to play a concerto with your orchestra and was delighted that he wanted to do the glorious Grieg – a piece I have listened to many times but am only now getting to grips with playing it. To misquote Morecambe and Wise, I hope to play most of the right notes in mostly the right order!

I look forward to meeting you all and working with you towards our concert at the end of April.

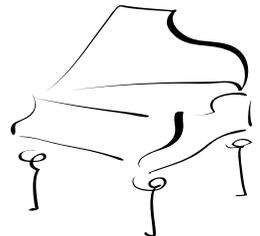


Grieg's Piano Concerto in A minor

Grieg was Norway's only composer of international significance in the 19th Century. He was generally happiest writing miniatures and seemed to struggle with composing large scale works; Debussy famously described Grieg's music as "pink bon-bons stuffed with snow". The *Piano Concerto* is a notable exception, though not without "pink bonbon" moments. It owes a lot to Schumann's *Piano Concerto* which is no coincidence as Grieg had heard Schumann's Concerto in Leipzig, where it had been performed by Clara Schumann. The meeting of composers in the late 19th Century was greatly enhanced by the advent of railways which facilitated trans-European travel and it is no surprise to find that a late 19th Century composer like Grieg had many associations with composers who came before him and composers who came after. He visited Franz Liszt in Rome, where Liszt sight-read the concerto, both piano and orchestral parts. Grieg was hugely impressed by this but remarked that Liszt had performed the first movement too quickly. Liszt in turn suggested giving the second subject of the first movement to the trumpets. Grieg followed this advice but later placed it with the cellos. In fact many revisions were made to the work over the years.

Musical Structure

The piece is structured conventionally and Grieg does not break any new musical ground, and the melodic beauty and intense lyricism shine through in abundance. The first movement is in *sonata* form with a cadenza. The piano



introduces the first group of subjects, the cellos the second. The development section contains intense interplay between piano and orchestra and in the recapitulation the original material is repeated with different harmonies and scoring. The slow movement is in the remote key of D flat, and is generally very calm and lyrical. The *finale* has two main themes, the first of which is a native Norwegian dance called a “lalling”, and the second is another beautiful melody, introduced by the flute. The piece ends with a dramatic transformation of the lalling in triple time and a powerful reprise of the second theme. Above all the success of the piece probably derives from its working on two levels – as a brilliant pianistic showcase whilst also being underpinned by a taught, well-thought-out musical structure.

Grieg and Grainger

Towards the end of his life Grieg met the eccentric Australian genius, Percy Grainger. In a short period of time they became great friends, with Grieg hailing Grainger as one of the only musicians who understood the Norwegian folk music which meant such a lot to Grieg. In July 1907 Grainger spent 10 days at Grieg’s house near Bergen where the pair worked at revision and rehearsal of the concerto for a performance in Leeds in 1907. Their plans for a long term working relationship however were thwarted by Grieg’s sudden death in 1907.

Grainger championed the concerto for the rest of his life, thereby contributing greatly to its, as well as his own, enduring popularity. Grainger made many recordings of the piece in which emotional intensity and sheer energy transcend the inaccuracy of his playing. The Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe recalls a performance by Grainger where Grainger leapt from the piano stool at figure H of the *finale*, ran to the back of the concert hall and then back to the stage, arriving just in time for his cadenza.

This apparently was a regular occurrence in Grainger’s performances and in one live recording, under Stokowski in 1945, the orchestra accelerates during this passage.

One can imagine Grainger having to move a little faster than normal to get back, and his first entry of the cadenza bears the hallmarks of it having been a close run thing! Grainger was always nervous of his ability as a pianist and one story relates to Grieg asking him to play the octaves at the end of the first movement “faster, as Busoni did”, and Grainger having to admit that he couldn’t.





The concerto in popular culture

The piano concerto had its first flush of major success when, as the first piano concerto to be recorded, it was issued on a 78rpm record in an abridged 6 minute version. Since then it has entered mainstream popular culture: the first few bars are probably recognisable to most of the population of the Western World, even when in the hands of Eric Morecambe, whose Christmas 1971 recording of part of the concerto remains one of the funniest musical performances ever.

The second Grieg piano concerto?

About 15 years after writing the *Concerto in A minor*, Grieg seems to have considered writing another Concerto, in B minor, but only 6 pages of sketches have survived. It has been elaborated by Laurent Beekmans and there is a recording on YouTube. It ploughs the same ground as the A minor concerto but rather less memorably.

Chris Gardner

CONGRATULATIONS...

...to our very own Georgie, viola player and fabulous clarinet soloist when we played *Rhapsody in Blue*. Not only has Georgie got into the National Youth Orchestra, she has earned the esteemed position of Principal Viola!

Well done Georgie!!

My Introduction to Playing the Accordion

I was born in Dagenham, Essex, so yes I am an Essex Girl and I well remember the Dagenham Girl Pipers. I learnt piano from the age of 7 years working up to Grade 8.

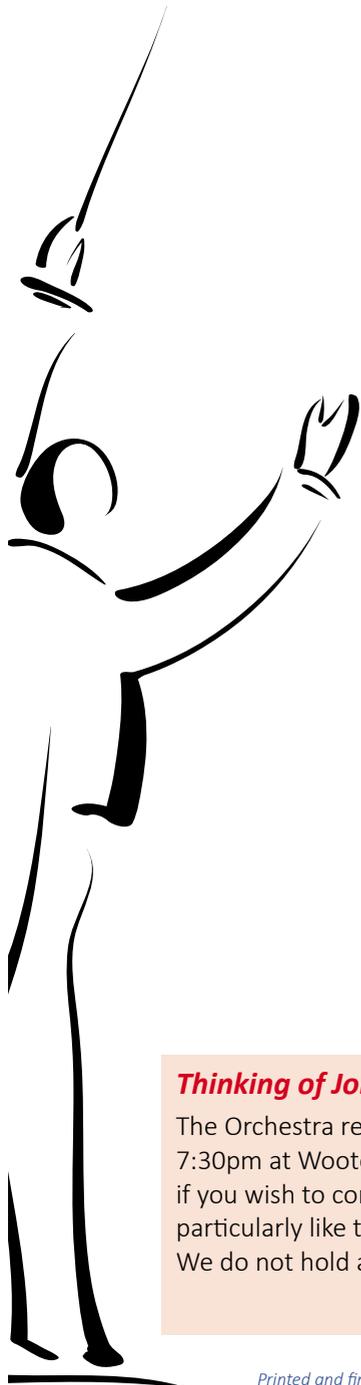
When Bob and I married we moved to Hampshire as he was working at the RAE Farnborough. We quickly became involved in Folk Dancing and Music. I decided to have a go at playing the accordion – going to music workshops locally and at Folk Festivals, mainly at Sidmouth and Chipenham but also at Halsway Manor, the EFDSS country retreat. I was ok with the Treble keyboard but the Bass keyboard was a very different matter. Luckily the C Button in the Fundamental row is indented and so is a very useful “landmark” for keyboard location. Either side of “C” are the sharp notes to the right and flat notes to the left. You therefore have notes a fifth apart i.e. Db Ab Eb Bb F C G D A E B F#. This enables you to harmonize a simple Folk Tune with tonic, sub-dominant and dominant chords or I, IV and V.

The Rows are:

Counter Bass	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F#	C#	G#	D#	A#
Fundamental Bass	Db	Ab	Eb	Bb	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F#
Major Chords	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“
Minor Chords	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“
Seventh Chords	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“
Diminished Chords	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“	“

I now decided to start my own Folk Dance Band with my two sons playing bass guitar and banjo respectively. We called ourselves “The Wessex Ranters” and played for PTAs, weddings etc. My husband Bob was the Caller and we had some great times, playing for 20 years. Bob had joined the Farnborough Morris Team in 1975 who were mainly RAE people and when they became short of musicians I taught myself the Melodeon and started playing for them. When they disbanded we both joined Alton Morris and I played for them until 2006. A Melodeon is like the Harmonica – a different note on the pull and push – so forget about reading music, just go for it!

Jean Piper



Alton Concert Orchestra

Concert Season 2014–15

Christmas Concert

Saturday 13 December
Alton Maltings Centre, 7:30pm

Spring Concert

Saturday 25 April
Eggar's School, 7:30pm

Last Night of the Proms

Saturday 11 July
Alton Public Gardens, 7:30pm
*Rehearsal for LNOTP on Sunday 5 July, 2pm
at the Alton Maltings Centre*

Thinking of Joining us?

The Orchestra rehearses every Wednesday evening in term-time, 7:30pm at Wootey Junior School. Please contact us via our website if you wish to come along. Anyone is welcome although we would particularly like to encourage more strings, brass and percussion. We do not hold auditions.

www.altonconcertorchestra.org.uk

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