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Conductor's Podium

Alton Music Matters

Our concert on 23 April really does matter. It could just turn out to be a life-changing occasion for any of the young people who join us to play some of the BBC “Ten Pieces”. There is plenty of published research which shows how beneficial it is to play an instrument and to play an instrument in an ensemble. It develops parts of the brain which are otherwise unused. It develops emotional intelligence (because musical performance relies on reading body language rather than words), motor skills, and so on. Furthermore, a survey published in the Daily Mail in 2012 revealed that “not learning to play an instrument properly” was in the top twenty things regretted by adults in this country.

Whilst taking part in music is so obviously “a good thing” it is difficult for a School to provide the opportunity of playing in an orchestra. The chances of having the right balance of instruments are pretty small, and the expense of some of the larger and more rare instruments is more than many parents can afford. The moving of sixth forms into separate Colleges removes the most experienced players at a crucial stage of development. Thus we are providing a rare

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.

opportunity for children in Alton to take part in something exceptional.

We have based the day's activity on the second BBC "Ten Pieces" project, which is described as "...an exciting initiative for schools, led by BBC Learning and the BBC Performing Groups that aims to open up the world of classical music to a generation of children and inspire them to develop their own creative responses to ten pieces of music". The BBC has provided the musical material. They chose the pieces, commissioned simplified versions, and have produced a quantity of supporting material which includes well produced videos which put the music in a historical and dramatic context and which we have featured on our Facebook pages. The music suffers a little in the process of being simplified, and the instrumentation reduced, but of course that is not the point, and those who own the copyright in the more recent pieces are clearly happy for the music to be used in this way.

Our solo contribution, Beethoven's *Leonore No. 2 Overture* (one of four that he wrote for his opera "Fidelio"), provides an excellent curtain raiser because the story behind it is highly dramatic and should capture attention immediately. The introduction portrays Florestan in the cell in which he has been unjustly imprisoned by the wicked Pizarro, who has told everyone that Florestan is dead. The theme we hear is his aria "Gott Welch Dunkel hier!" ("God, what darkness here!"). The energetic central section of the overture recalls the happier days Florestan had with his wife, Leonore. Disguised as "Fidelio", a prison warder, she has infiltrated the castle to find her husband, and at one ghastly point in the story finds herself detailed to dig his grave. Unlike most Wagner and Verdi however, Beethoven's opera ends happily. A trumpet, first in the distance, heralds the arrival of Fernando, the prison governor,

BBC Ten Pieces for Secondary

J.S. Bach, orch. Stokowski: Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565
Bernstein: 'Mambo' from Symphonic Dances from 'West Side Story'
Bizet: 'Habanera' and 'Toreador Song' from 'Carmen Suite No. 2'
Anna Clyne: Night Ferry
Haydn: Trumpet Concerto (3rd movement)

who suspects Pizarro of foul play. The second, closer, fanfare raises Fidelio's hopes still more, and his last wonderings give way to a triumphant and happy ending as Fernando secures his release from gaol.

The other pieces give a wonderful view over the repertoire of symphonic orchestral music. They are the brash "Mambo" from Bernstein's *West Side Story*, Bizet's sensuous *Habanera*, Grieg's *In the Hall of the Mountain King* and the stunning scherzo from Shostakovich's *10th Symphony*. These pieces all have a dramatic context. The first three are respectively from a musical (based on *Romeo and Juliet*), an opera (*Carmen*), and a play (*Peer Gynt*). The Shostakovich reflects the real life drama of his relationship with Stalin at a time when the Russian establishment kept a tight rein on what composers were and were not allowed to write, with the permanent risk of falling out of favour and being sent to the Gulag.

Our role is to arrive on the day well-rehearsed and able to play the pieces so that our guests can be welcomed and will find themselves well supported in the ensemble. Most of them will be playing music they would not otherwise expect to play and they will experience the unique excitement of playing in an orchestra. They will become part of a group of people who are completely united in achieving the goal of excellent performance, and in the process many of them will find they exceed their normal level of musical achievement.

Chris Gardner

Gabriel Prokofiev: Concerto for Turntables and Orchestra (5th mvt)
Shostakovich: Symphony No. 10 (2nd movement)
Vaughan Williams: The Lark Ascending
Verdi: 'Dies Irae' and 'Tuba Mirum' from 'Requiem'
Wagner: 'Ride of the Valkyries' from 'Die Walküre'



Graham Wili

Guest conductor for Alton Music Matters, 23 April



Graham is Principal Conductor of the English Philharmonia orchestra and is in demand as a conductor and vocal coach both nationally and internationally. In December 2014 he conducted the Russian Philharmonic Orchestra in Moscow and following the success of this concert he was invited back to conduct again in 2015.

He is also Musical Director of three choirs and the English Philharmonia Chorus. Graham has been conducting concerts with his choirs across Europe for the past 14 years in some of Europe's most prestigious venues.

His recording of *Nowell! Nowell!* received outstanding reviews and BBC Music Magazine rated it as excellent.

Graham has worked closely with the National Youth Choir of Wales for many years as a vocal coach and run highly successful choral workshops with the Association of British Choral Directors (ABCD).

Future projects include conducting Christmas and Baroque concerts with the Russian Philharmonic Orchestra in Moscow in 2015/2016, and Verdi *Requiem* at the Royal Festival Hall in 2016.

Experiencing a Virtual London Philharmonia

[Article inspired by a clipping from The Times, 29 Jan, kindly provided by Megan.]

Have you ever wanted to know what it is like to be a part of a professional orchestra but believed you would never have that opportunity? The London Philharmonia will be offering just such an opportunity at the Royal Festival Hall this autumn – as a virtual reality experience!

In collaboration with technology company Inition and the Royal Festival Hall, the London Philharmonia will offer visitors the chance to experience a performance of Sibelius' *Symphony No. 5* via virtual reality headsets. Visitors will feel they are sitting right in front of the orchestra's conductor, Esa-Pekka Salonen.



Luke Ritchie, Digital Director of the London Philharmonia says: “...we are going to transform the foyer into a giant digital performance of *The Planets* by Holst with 37 screens, a giant dome, conductor pods where you can conduct the orchestra, and a percussion room where you can play along to the music.” According to *The Times*, players must “keep to a variety of time signatures dictated by the music or listen to the musicians go out of tune and object by coughing loudly”.

Although these virtual reality experiences have been available previously in different locations and venues, this will be the first time that a UK audience will be able to experience them with a UK orchestra. Apparently the orchestra intends eventually to make the experience available to people in their own homes via equipment such as the Sony PlayStation Move.

Digital Takeover of the Royal Festival Hall will run from 23 Sept–2 Oct 2016.

For more information, visit:
www.philharmonia.co.uk/vr

Helen Harvey



Recording with Phil Andrews

One chilly Saturday in February, Rachel Boardman, Christine Meers and I joined with other musicians at Eggars School to record a CD of a selection of Phil Andrews' works, ostensibly with a Jane Austen theme.



The main hall at the school had been turned into a recording studio for the day and the piano had been tuned especially for the occasion. Working with us was professional sound engineer Tim Hand from Oxford where he has been production manager for the Oxford Contemporary Music Festival for many years. Tim has also managed sound production for events in top national venues (including the Royal Festival Hall, Royal Albert Hall and the Barbican) and is a regular member of the sound team for the London Jazz Festival.



Safe in the hands of a professional, Christine and I dressed our instruments with dedicated violin and cello microphones clipped on close to the bridge, which was a new experience. We had to remember not to wander too far away with our instruments without unplugging them first!



Rachel, Christine and I were joined by flautist Alison Cairns and pianist David Bonser (of Grieg *Piano Concerto* fame) to record Phil's *Jane Austen Suite*. The suite takes as its subject for each movement a different female character from each of Austen's published novels. We were all familiar with the suite, having performed it previously. The main challenge of the day was in fact to keep ourselves and our instruments warm. We had to keep the heating switched off while recording due to the noise it made, and the wind instruments in particular were quite unhappy about this situation. It is difficult to warm up a school hall sufficiently in the short time between takes! But we persevered and the results were commendable.

I also worked with David to record parts of Phil's *Chawton Suite* (to add to other parts already recorded), and a number of songs for piano and tenor voice will also feature on the CD.

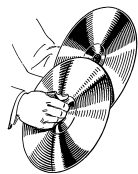
The CD itself is to be produced over the next few weeks. It will be distributed to potential performers and relevant media in the UK and overseas ahead of next year's bi-centenary of Jane Austen's death, informing them of the availability of Phil's wonderful pieces for inclusion in local or regional celebrations of the occasion. Also on the CD will be examples of Phil's song-writing and his choral work, including a performance of his lovely *Farewell* recorded live in Rome last year. The CD will be distributed free to the performers represented on it, and to members of the audience at a special concert to take place at the Friends' Meeting House, Alton on Friday 6 May.

The concert on 6 May has three particular purposes: to provide a varied programme of good-quality music in a lovely setting; to provide a shop window for a selection of Phil's music by dedicating 50% of the programme to material written by him; and to raise the funds needed to cover the costs of making and distributing the CD.

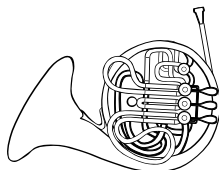
The ticket price will be £12.50 to cover both concert and CD (to be distributed on the night). Tickets will be on sale direct from The Knitting Habit, Market Street, Alton and by e-mail from Luath Grant Ferguson (lmcigf64@gmail.com). Ticket numbers will be limited and will go on sale in the shop from Saturday, 2 April, but may be reserved by e-mail at the address above.

Helen Harvey

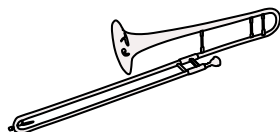
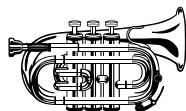




Alton Concert Orchestra



Concert Season 2015–16



Concert at Wootey Juniors

Wednesday 14 October
Wootey Junior School, 7:30pm

Wonder of Christmas

Saturday 19 December
Alton Maltings Centre, 7:30pm



Alton Music Matters: Young Musicians Perform a Selection from BBC 'Ten Pieces'

*In collaboration with Eggars
and Amery Hill Schools
Conductor: Graham Wili*

Saturday 23 April
Eggar's School, 5:00pm
*Daytime rehearsal from 11am
for orchestra members*



Last Night of the Proms

Saturday 9 July
Alton Public Gardens, 7:30pm
*Rehearsal Sunday 3 July, Alton Maltings, 2pm
and afternoon rehearsal on Saturday 9 July*



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