

Forty!



Years!

Langtree Sinfonia

SUMMER 2011

A termly newsletter for members and friends of the orchestra

NOTES FROM THE CHAIR

NEVER BEFORE in the history of Langtree Sinfonia have we run out of wine glasses in a concert interval. What better celebration of our 40th anniversary than to have a record audience in Dorchester Abbey! There were many memorable moments, not least Sally's silver '40' suspended from the Abbey roof by 'wireman' Tim, and Jeremy's virtuoso piano playing in Beethoven's *Choral Fantasia* raising a rousing cheer from the audience. The unaccompanied choral pieces were thoroughly enjoyed by players and audience (thanks to both choirs and to Jeremy). A member of the audience who had spontaneously come to the concert having seen the posters while visiting Dorchester earlier in the day complimented us on the way the conductor guided the orchestra and created 'ebb and flow' in the Brahms Overture.

I hope Bill feels this was a fitting farewell concert and that he will take away many happy memories of his time as leader. The search for a new leader is ongoing but Bill will be greatly missed not only as a violinist and leader but also as a member of the post-rehearsal drinking club that meets at The Black Horse every Wednesday. (*This 'club', is it like the Masons or can anyone join? Ed.*) There is much more to relate about Bill but I will leave that to Antony, whose article follows on in this newsletter and Bill himself who has written a valediction.

This seems a time to say goodbyes. We are also saying farewell to Antony who is moving to Bath. The orchestra, especially the wind section will miss his enthusiasm and gentle encouragement of others; not to mention his role as the orchestra's unofficial medical consultant and, together with Sue, as host of some memorable garden parties. We will say a proper farewell to both Bill and Antony at The Four Horseshoes on July 6th.

I read recently about Spira Mirabilis, an orchestra comprised of Europe's best young musicians. They play un-conducted and without anyone leading from the first violins. They test their ideas about interpretation to extremes,

spending as long as three and a half hours working on, for example, the first movement of Beethoven's 4th Symphony, experimenting with tempi, phrasing, articulation etc., before deciding on a collective vision. It sounds wonderful but obviously only works because of their excellent technique and the closeness of their relationships. So no, Paul, we certainly can't do without you. We marvel at your ability to bring together such a motley crew to create a performance.

Have a great summer break. See you in September.

Chris

A fond farewell to Bill

I FIRST MET BILL as we were toiling up the hill on our bikes from the London train. Often he was carrying a violin on his back after playing string quartets for many years with City Lit after work. There he got advice and encouragement from those top players of the day who have been so generous and influential in my experience too.

He had come a long way from Cumbria via its formative grammar school to do National Service in Germany (where he picked up that treasure of a violin) and join the Civil Service.

There he ranged from Falkirk to the Falklands, from Essex to India, finally drawing up the bill for the first Gulf war before retirement and a second career as an orchestral player. We played together awhile in the Saturday Morning Orchestra from where, as a result of a squash match with Hugh Lewis, he was drawn into higher things - first Henley and then Langtree. He became leader of Langtree in 1992 and we have been happily following him ever since. We are grateful too for his network of friends that fill out our ranks and make it possible, especially in the summer concert, to play those bigger works that have been such a rewarding experience for us all.

We wish Bill well for the future and wonder if it will be with the viola - one who cannot go to bed without playing a bit and perseveres with studying technique and new fingerings cannot

possibly stop now. Golf will get him out of the house and his large family will always claim his love and attention, but I know myself now the pleasure of stepping down into an inner part. One can relax and listen to the whole orchestra more, while contributing much to still to the whole texture.

Personally I shall miss the chats in the car and the Wednesday evenings that always end so convivially in the Black Horse in Checkendon after another heart-warming session with the orchestra at Langtree.

Antony Branfoot

A flourishing and friendly band

I BELIEVE I have spent a greater time with Langtree than any other member, though not continuously. I first joined the orchestra in, I believe, its second year. I had just purchased an oboe, an old George Howarth, and was having lessons when I saw an advertisement for players to join a newly formed orchestra. I went along and said I was only just learning but the conductor, Jimmy Brewer, simply said come along and try. I said I had not yet learned sharps but he said, well, we mostly play flat keys. Anyway I duly turned up and was presented with a part for Chabrier's *Joyeuse Marche* which made it a steep learning curve.

The orchestra then had Jimmy, who played various brass instruments as required and Kathy, his wife who played viola; I cannot remember the few string players but I think Patsy was one. Clarinets were Tony Meadows and Tricia Claxton or Jack Wilkinson, only one oboe (me) and a flautist who only played recorder (Antony will remember his name – he recently died). Anyway the orchestra got better and more players appeared.

One thing I remember was that we acted as pit orchestra for Beaconsfield Opera and played *Pirates*, *Yeomen* and *Ruddigore* in the cinema there until such performances were forbidden by Health and Safety! I later left Langtree and, after switching to bassoon, played with Henley for many years but returned to Langtree when Ken Latham died and since then have seen no reason to leave a flourishing and friendly band.

Neil Isaacs

NOW WE ARE 40

It's surely not the fortieth
Since Price and Wilkinson drew breath
And Coxes three and all their chums
On brass and woodwind, strings and drums,
Played sweetest music of their dreams
To burst through Langtree's solid seams?

Since then our music's come of age,
We've pounded Dvorák page by page;
Violas, flutes and double-bass
Have flogged Beethoven at a pace.
And though not quite as Ludwig planned,
Not bad enough to get us banned
From Langtree's quite delightful hall
That vibrates weekly for us all.

We've got Brahms sewn up, to the inch
With oboe played by dear Chris Winch.
Tchaikovsky's tamed, and Schumann too;
We might now tackle someone new
Like Cook, whose music strikes a tone
But sadly leaves us on our own
As he goes off to find, and dangle
New percussion – his triangle!
We're flexible that's very clear
And sometimes talented; and we're
Indebted to that Boughton fellow
For playing piano, and his 'cello.

So, picture if you will, the scene:
Czechs bouncing up to Antonín
To prophesy: 'In 90 years
(Give or take a year or two
Poetic licence begs a few)
Not Malcolm Sergeant, have no fear,
But brave Paul Cox with perfect ear,
And tempi, and tonality,
(Avoiding all banality)
Will play your Eighth (or is it Fourth?)
To all South Oxon (and the North).'

We ought to ask the Lord to come
To listen as we bang his drum.
Not literally, that would be rude,
A drum would spoil the velvet mood
As Phantom's syrup sweetly plays
New repertoire – our modern phase.
Perhaps this heralds new tunes spun,
As next year – we'll be forty-one!

Adrian King, Poet Laureate of the Langtree

The Journey

AS YOU WILL KNOW by now I have decided to stand down as leader of the Langtree Sinfonia at the end of the year and the editor has, sharp as ever, asked me to pen a few words reflecting upon my time with the orchestra. As Paul said to me after the May 2011 concert, 'well, it's been quite a journey'; and indeed it has!

Narrante

I first met Paul Cox in the mid 1980's when, although still commuting to Whitehall on a daily basis, I played with the Reading University orchestra for a few years. Paul was doing a post graduate course at the university and led the cellos for a while. I played in the 1st violins with Susan Thompson as leader and Professor Peter Wishart (head of the then Music Faculty) as conductor. Towards the end of the 1980s, at the instigation of Hugh Lewis (remember him - luthier extraordinaire and keen orchestral member?), I left the University orchestra and joined the Henley Symphony Orchestra. My desk partner at HSO was Peter Cox, a very experienced fiddler, most excellent colleague and Paul's Dad to boot. We got on extremely well and it wasn't too long before Peter was asking me to help out at some of the Langtree concerts. In the early 1990s Peter retired and he and wife, Marjorie, realised a long held dream and moved to the West Country (Dulverton in Devon I believe) but before he went he asked me if I would be interested in leading the then Langtree Orchestral Society which had just embarked on a tremendous musical journey of its own. The Committee had, very bravely, decided to play the total Beethoven symphonic canon in chronological order at successive concerts. Who could resist such a challenge? Certainly not me so I signed up for the job with effect from the beginning of the 1991/92 season.

Colla voce

I had earlier assisted in the first Beethoven concert - Symphony No 1 - but missed, for some reason that now escapes me, Symphony No 2. The programme for my first concert as Leader included the *Eroica* Symphony (No 3) which we performed in November 1991 in Langtree School Hall before a large and very appreciative audience. Symphonies Nos 4 - 8 followed but I couldn't see how we could raise enough singers with the right experience to perform the Choral Symphony (No 9) until Paul came up with the brilliant idea of combining, over a single day, a choral workshop

in the morning with an ad-hoc choir made up from members of local choral societies, a rehearsal with the orchestra in the afternoon and a performance in the evening. The concert took place at the Oratory School in May 1996 and was extremely well received.

Posato

The orchestra followed its successful Beethoven journey with many other memorable concerts, some featuring promising young artists at early stages in their professional careers. Amongst the highlights for me were the Elgar violin concerto with Carol Irby as soloist; the Grieg, Rachmaninov 2nd and 3rd and Tchaikovsky 1st Piano Concertos with the young, dynamic and personable Juliet Allen; Christian Persinaru's splendid performances of the Dvorak and Sibelius Violin Concertos; Todor Nikolaev's sensitive interpretation of the Beethoven Violin Concerto and Jens Franke's exciting rendition of Rodrigue's *Concierto de Aranjuez* at Abingdon's St Helen's church.

Amabile

The summer workshops at Shiplake College with its wonderful facilities, including the open air swimming pool, were also noteworthy and I will recall the fantastic experience of playing, in this environment, such challenging works as Mahler Symphonies Nos 1 and 4; Elgar's *Enigma Variations* as well as Rimsky Korsakov's *Scheherazade* and *Capriccio Espagnol* with their very demanding solo violin passages. Thanks a bundle Paul for the latter! Another intriguing part of the journey was the link we had to the Eureka Foundation. There were some interesting joint efforts including a performance of Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante* for Violin and Viola with Ron Colyer and Guy Haskell as soloists and a very, very particular favourite of mine - Strauss' *Four Last Songs* - with Sharon Bowen Davies.

Gustoso

I must also mention as an abiding memory the orchestra's journey to Bellême in July 2003 (the orchestra's second, my first visit), under the umbrella of the Goring/Bellême Twinning Association, where we gave a concert in the little church of St Remy. The programme consisted of Mozart's *Magic Flute* Overture, Poulenc's Flute Concerto (with Jacqui Baines as soloist) and Beethoven Symphony No 1. The audience was so enthusiastic that we had to repeat the Overture

as an encore. Apart from the music the hospitality was generous and very French.

Dissonante

Of course, it's inevitable that some mishaps will occur over 20 years of continuous music making; it would be boring were it otherwise! Some that come to mind include the separation, in all the excitement, of the choir and orchestra towards the end of the Choral symphony concert way back in 1996; we finished in a blaze of cohesive orchestral sound but I still have nightmares over the episode. Then there was the single misplaced trombone entry in the famous chord 'hammer blow' sequence at the end of Sibelius 5 - six chords are written in the score; we played seven and we still had to pay the errant trombonist! I also remember the famous solo cello and violin duet in the last movement of the Dvorak cello concerto when the soloist, playing from memory, skipped a bar leaving the solo violin high and dry for a bar or two. Then, more recently, at the May 2011 concert in Dorchester Abbey my desk partner turned over 2 pages at once in the last movement of Dvorak 6; this produced a 6 - 8 bar lacuna on the front desk but the rest of the section was unperturbed and no-one in the audience seemed to notice. O Happy Days!

Omaggio

As Leader one becomes an ex-officio member of the Committee. Committee meetings in my early days with the orchestra were really something. They were invariably held in Louise Warner's (viola and librarian) house in Woodcote where we were regally and most generously entertained. Apart from looking after the Committee I seem to remember that she kept a motherly eye on the young Paul and consistently provided him with a snack (including hot soup) before rehearsals; no doubt to keep the sugar levels up! The Chairman at the time was Jack Wilkinson (Clarinet) who was instrumental in founding the orchestra and who ruled the Committee with a rod of iron. Then, of course, there was dear Edward (Price - Clarinet) who was the Treasurer and public face of the orchestra for many years. Edward and I exchanged many rather dubious jokes and 'shaggy dog' stories over two decades. Sadly Louise, Jack, Edward and Hugh are no longer with us but are all well remembered

Ritardando

I have been associated very productively with the Langtree orchestra for over 20 years - it hardly seems that long - but it is now time for me to step down from the 'hot seat' and do other things whilst I am still able. I have much enjoyed my time as Leader and wish you all joy and continued good music making in the future.

Bill Osler

Many thanks to all contributors. We were a little short of space in this issue for obvious reasons. If your article has not appeared it will be in the Autumn newsletter.
