



# Langtree Sinfonia

WINTER 2011

*A termly newsletter for members and friends of the orchestra*

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## NOTES FROM THE CHAIR

WE ARE COMING TO the end of our 40th anniversary year, and I hope everyone will feel it has been a success. Two concerts with good audiences and excellent soloists! St Mary le More in Wallingford seems to be a workable venue for us, especially since the absence of the charity Christmas card stalls provided us with more space. Our next concert on May 12<sup>th</sup> (please put the date in your diaries!) will be at St. Helen's church in Abingdon. We might have to work harder to get a decent audience there. Hopefully Haydn's *Nelson Mass* featuring the combined choirs of Dorchester Abbey and The Thames Consort will prove to be an attraction. Apologies for the last minute cancellation of rehearsal on November 30<sup>th</sup>. We were not notified that the school was unavailable until the day before, which gave little time to organise an alternative venue. Getting in touch with you all under these circumstances can be a nightmare, especially if contact numbers or e-mail addresses turn out to be incorrect. Could you check that your details on the Orchestra list are correct. Jane endeavours to keep the website up to date so always check that for any news. In the meantime let's hope for a glitch free start to next year! Happy Christmas, *Chris*.

## Raffle news

A BIG THANKS to all you loyal raffle ticket buyers - we have raised £80 this term. (Judging by the number of cheques from the Treasurer we have also performed a valuable loose change service ensuring Jane's boys continue to receive their school dinners!)

## READY OR NOT!

OF COURSE we'll be ready for next concert day  
There's thirteen rehearsals to go;  
We've played all the fast movements through at  
half-speed  
(and don't they sound nice when they're slow!)  
The woodwind and strings don't co-ordinate yet  
Though that's not uncommon to find,  
And Paul's right-hand beat is ahead of the game  
While his left-hand is somewhat behind.  
But these things are simply what Langtree  
does best

We know we'll be right on the day,  
The tempo, the tuning, the ensemble, too  
Will be fine - if Paul shows us the way.

I feel worried now, are we really on track?  
We've just seven Wednesdays ahead;  
The soloist's coming; remember last time?  
If looks could kill we'd all be dead!  
The fast bits are coming together at last  
But that complex slow rhythm's a killer  
(I can't think why Beethoven put that bit in -  
Perhaps it was meant as a filler ...)  
The simplest of things seem to get in our way  
Like not reading the dot on the crotchet;  
We just need to practise again and again,  
Scribble notes in the margin - and watch it!

No, we'll *never* be able to play it in time!  
The concert's on Saturday week;  
Even the slow movement seems hard to play  
Though Paul says it just needs a tweak.  
The audience always applaud what we do  
So when we're unrhythmic or flat  
If the flute and the 'cellos just play a bit louder  
They'll compensate nicely for that.  
But we don't know the bowing, the wind's out of  
breath,  
The brass seem to be out of kilter  
And I'm sure the bassoon shouldn't make those  
high squeaks  
What we need's a high frequency filter!

So what of the music we're playing next term?  
 It's bound to be something that's new ...  
 But will it be *Largo* for page after page or  
*Prestissimo* all the way through?  
 I tremble, recalling the nightmare I had  
 That depicted an officers' meeting;  
 Unseen like a house-fly perched high on the wall  
 I watched all the arguments heating.  
 Chris Winch, dressed in feathers with gossamer  
 wings  
 Was chairing the awkward discussion,  
 The players thought anything German would do,  
 While Paul said it had to be Russian.

So the final selection that Chris had to make  
 After stiff gin and tonic prepared her  
 Was a toss-up between Shostakovich 'fifteen'  
 And Mahler's *Das lied von der Erde*.  
 The truth is that we are a versatile group  
 And we get quite a lot for our fees  
 We can master John Cage's long passage of  
 quiet  
 And force our way through *Für Elise*.  
 We don't need sheet music it's just a red-herring:  
 Composers' intention to baffle.  
 And rehearsals are jollies, we don't really need  
 them  
 They're just an excuse for a raffle!

*Adrian King*

## STRINGS FOR EVER!

A seasonal extract from *Under the Greenwood Tree* by Thomas Hardy (who was himself a fine fiddler)

'YET THERE'S WORSE things than serpents,' said Mr. Penny. 'Old things pass away, 'tis true; but a serpent was a good old note: a deep rich note was the serpent.'

'Clar'nets, however, be bad at all times,' said Michael Mail. 'One Christmas--years ago now, years--I went the rounds wi' the Weatherbury quire. 'Twas a hard frosty night, and the keys of all the clar'nets froze--ah, they did freeze!--so that 'twas like drawing a cork every time a key was opened; and the players o' 'em had to go into a hedger-and-ditcher's chimley-corner, and thaw their clar'nets every now and then. An icicle o' spet hung down from the end of every man's clar'net a span long; and as to fingers--well, there, if ye'll believe me, we had no fingers at all, to our knowing.'

'I can well bring back to my mind,' said Mr. Penny, 'what I said to poor Joseph Ryme (who took the treble part in Chalk-Newton Church for two-and- forty year) when they thought of having clar'nets there. 'Joseph,' I said, says I, 'depend upon't, if so be you have them tooting clar'nets you'll spoil the whole set-out. Clar'nets were not made for the service of the Lard; you can see it by looking at 'em,' I said. And what came o't? Why, souls, the parson set up a barrel-organ on his own account within two years o' the time I spoke, and the old quire went to nothing.'

'As far as look is concerned,' said the tranter, 'I don't for my part see that a fiddle is much nearer heaven than a clar'net. 'Tis further off. There's always a rakish, scampish twist about a fiddle's looks that seems to say the Wicked One had a hand in making o'en; while angels be supposed to play clar'nets in heaven, or som'at like 'em, if ye may believe picters.'

'Robert Penny, you was in the right,' broke in the eldest Dewy. 'They should ha' stuck to strings. Your brass-man is a rafting dog--well and good; your reed-man is a dab at stirring ye--well and good; your drum-man is a rare bowel-shaker--good again. But I don't care who hears me say it, nothing will spak to your heart wi' the sweetness o' the man of strings!'

'Strings for ever!' said little Jimmy.

'Strings alone would have held their ground against all the new comers in creation.' ('True, true!' said Bowman.) 'But clarinets was death.' ('Death they was!' said Mr. Penny.) 'And harmonions,' William continued in a louder voice, and getting excited by these signs of approval, 'harmonions and barrel-organs' ('Ah!' and groans from Spinks) 'be miserable--what shall I call 'em?--miserable--'

'Sinners,' suggested Jimmy, who made large strides like the men, and did not lag behind like the other little boys.

'Miserable dumbledores!'

'Right, William, and so they be--miserable dumbledores!' said the choir with unanimity.

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*Thanks to everyone who has contributed to the newsletter this year - whether in verse or prose - and a very merry Christmas and happy 2012.*

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