

Langtree news



In this edition...

Tim Cook on learning to conduct. (Apparently it's harder than it looks.)

Librarian and elder statesman of the orchestra, Neil Isaacs reveals a few things about himself on page 3

Notes from the Chair

Good news! We have finally been accepted as a registered charity after months of hard work from Christine. So very many thanks to her. Hopefully this will help to improve our financial situation.

Everyone attending the workshop on Dvorak's 5th Symphony thoroughly enjoyed the day (*see above*) but what a shame that we could only muster a very small violin section. Two seconds and four firsts! We need your feedback. What should we do next year?

Would it be better on a Saturday, or at a different time of year? Emails with your thoughts and suggestions would be welcomed and could then be discussed at our next committee meeting.

Do you have any friends, family or work colleagues who would be prepared to become a friend/patron of the orchestra? Our list of patrons has dwindled over the years. Jane, our treasurer, will let you have details.

Chris Winch

From the editor

Rather a short newsletter this term — it would be lovely to hear from other sections of the orchestra in addition to my loyal and literary compatriots in the second violins.

Email me your copy at:
janita.clamp@btinternet.com



It's harder than you might think

Tim Cook on conducting an orchestra for the first time



This year I reluctantly missed the Langtree workshop because I had won a place on a Conducting Master-class at Abingdon Music Festival to be given by Peter Stark who is Professor of Conducting at the Royal Academy of Music and has conducted many famous orchestras including the Halle.

There were six of us 'students' and the plan was that each of us would get 45 minutes rehearsal then conduct a part of the public concert of the Overture Meistersingers and Tchaikovsky's Third symphony.

Preparation

I downloaded the score (181 pages!), bought a CD and made myself a baton. The first question was how long to make it! Looking on the web I saw you could buy them at 12 inches and 14 inches but Wikipedia told me that Sir Henry Wood had a special one made 24 inches long! I didn't

want to turn up inadequately endowed, on the other hand I didn't want to embarrass myself with one that was much more impressive than my capabilities so I went for 12 inches. I painted it with some white gloss and it looked just like a real one! My movement was the second, *Alla Tedesca*, which at first (naive) sight looked pretty straightforward.

Unsurprisingly I experienced few difficulties conducting the CD although there is a bit in the trio where the beat seems to go 'THREE, one, two' rather than 'One, two, three'. I thought this might be a problem later. It was.

Training

Before we started we had 10 minutes chat from Peter who advised us to remember 'right hand quantity, left hand quality' and that, whatever else happened, we should keep a clear down-beat using the left hand for emphasis, dynamics, leads and anything else. Whilst this is fairly obvious, watching my fellow students it was interesting to see how, under high-stress conditions, a straight forward pattern could turn into a florid 'four up-beats per bar'. I resolved to try really hard not to do the same with my three-four. He talked about three different "motors", wrist, elbow and shoulder and how, for example in a crescendo or a *ritardando*, one

could progressively engage them. He pointed out that the function of the baton was to help distant members of the orchestra see conductors' hand movements more clearly by amplifying them. (I had often wondered what it was for!)

Peter suggested that we should aim to play our movement through so the orchestra got to see it all, noting bits to which we wanted to go back, but if we reached three such we should stop, because it's hard to remember more than three. He made the point that players like to play and we should avoid too much talk.

Luckily for me the training sessions were in concert order so I was up third. My movement only lasted seven minutes so I was able to go straight through and still have more than half an hour left! So we started to take it apart concentrating particularly on tempo changes and picking up after rits.

Peter Stark is a superb teacher and I learnt more watching him correcting my colleagues than I did when I was up there myself with my brain in a permanent panic. One interesting thing I noticed was that when Peter corrected something with one of the conductors the orchestra's sound was noticeably improved, with the same players, playing the same notes, on the same

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instruments! I should also pay tribute to the St Giles Orchestra who produced over fifty players for a whole day.

The performance

None of us actually collapsed! There were many rocky moments, not least with my

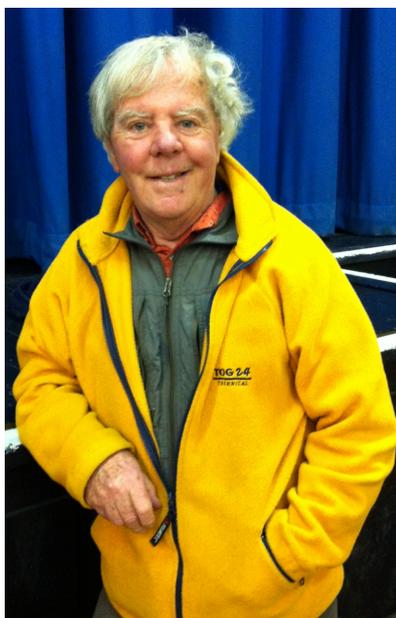
'Three, one, two' bit and I did find myself whispering '1-2-3' to myself and, to my embarrassment when I looked at the big screen, mouthing it, but we all survived and the loyal supporters in the audience seemed to enjoy it. The winner, who I was relieved

to learn was not me, has to conduct the overture to the Flying Dutchman in a concert. I was told that if there was a prize for 'most improved' I would have got it, but that might just be a measure of how badly I started!

Tim Cook

NINE QUESTIONS

*Orchestra librarian and bassoonist,
Neil Isaacs*



1) *What made you take up the bassoon?*

I learned the bassoon in around 1980 in order to play in Reading University Opera and continued playing with the Henley Symphony Orchestra until 2010.

2) *How long have you played with Langtree?*

I joined the orchestra in around 1970 when I played oboe. At that time the orchestra was run by Jimmy Brewer, a bandsman, and there were about ten players but it grew to a reasonable size and standard and we played in the pit for several years for Beaconsfield Opera (G and S).

3) *what is, or was, your day job?*

Chemistry lecturer at Reading University

4) *favourite book?*

Any Jane Austen;

5) *Desert Island Discs (list of eight favourites)*

- ⌘ Any Mozart opera
- ⌘ Strauss Four Last Songs
- ⌘ Bach St Matthew Passion
- ⌘ Bach B minor Mass
- ⌘ Schumann Fraue Lieben und Leben

⌘ Chopin Nocturnes

⌘ Mozart Grand Partita (preferably playing)

I could go on...

6) *non-musical hobbies?*

Sailing. I keep a boat at the coast but seem to spend more time on maintenance than actually sailing

7) *Tell us something unusual about yourself*

I was bassoonist in a wind sextet called Sweet Harmony. We played 17th century music in period dress — knee britches, buckles etc. but not wigs, these were just too hot and itchy!

8) *what do you enjoy most about playing with Langtree?*

I like the friendliness of Langtree; it is the right standard for me and we have a good deal of laughter there.

Who would you like to see featured here in the next issue? Suggestions to the editor please.

