

Langtree news

Notes from the Chair

On behalf of the orchestra I would like to thank Adrian King for his marathon fund-raising efforts for two excellent musical causes (see right hand column).

When I hear of the difficulties some amateur orchestras encounter it occurs to me that in spite of the occasional hiccup we are lucky to have Langtree School hall for our rehearsals.

Take the Kimbanguiste Symphony Orchestra in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In a time of great political instability, this orchestra has survived two attempted coups, various crises, and a war. Their conductor, Armand Diangendo, started the orchestra about 16 years ago with four violins, one double bass, and ten amateur musicians from the local church.

Instruments had to be shared and rehearsals organised in shifts so that all could have a go!

In 2006 the orchestra was badly affected by looting during the latest round of unrest, and playing on flutes made from pieces of pvc piping with holes drilled along the length, and using bicycle brake cables to replace broken violin strings. The orchestra repair artists use unorthodox methods, and a collection of self devised and self built tools to mend instruments.



Members of the orchestra travel miles on foot across town to attend rehearsals five times a week! Rehearsals are outdoors in a sweltering compound where music has to compete with the noise of rattling buses and street vendor. If it rains they have the use of a church hall. Members make concert attire themselves, others procure sheet music and make sure children are fed and looked after during rehearsals.

They are Central Africa's only Symphony Orchestra, and today, when they give a concert there can be as many as 200 musicians and singers on stage. A recent project was an open air concert which included Beethoven 9th Symphony, Carmina Burana, and works by Dvorak and Verdi. Food for thought.

Chris Winch

A warm thank you to all who sponsored me in the Reading Half Marathon. I managed to complete the course in the very slow time of 2 hours, 49 minutes and 50 seconds. I suppose the time doesn't really matter, though it was somewhat slower than I had hoped!

Half the money raised comes to Langtree, while the other half is going to a fund that provides bursaries to young musicians to get a week's tuition from top professionals at the Aberystwyth Musicfest. As you might guess, the Festival organisers struggle to raise the money they need to make ends meet. I particularly recall the enjoyment I had at last year's Festival as I listened to a girl from Croatia playing one of the Beethoven Sonatas exquisitely, and four very young Norwegian lads superbly playing a Haydn String Quartet.

Just last week, I was offered £10 from my final sponsor, on the phone. I'll collect it on July 18th when I next see him. His kind gesture brings the total sponsorship money to £891.50, much more than I dared imagine the run would raise. Thank you everyone.

Adrian King

Read Adrian's poetic account of his marathon on page 3.



A SHORT MUSICAL TOUR - SIMON HILL ON MIXING PLEASURE WITH BUSINESS

Travel for business is not something that I enjoy so, in order to make it a little more palatable, I try and find a few musical distractions. The following is a brief rundown of a recent trip to Asia and Australia.

Kuala Lumpur Malaysia has, I believe, a good concert hall but to date I have been frustrated in my attempts to be entertained there. My hotel was very close to Petronas Towers which houses the auditorium and after some meetings I went to the box office to enquire about that evening's programme. 'Ahh' said the girl, 'tonight we don't have anything but if you had been here last night we had a very good performance'. There was nothing else on offer while I was in KL so I left once again without getting into the concert hall.

Next on the itinerary was a conference in Singapore for a couple of days and the organisers laid on evening entertainment in some bars in Boat Quay, a lively area downtown, with free drinks and food. This sounded good but got even better when I found out that in two bars next to each other, one had some girls doing pole dancing and the other a great jazz band. The sets were thoughtfully arranged so that they wouldn't conflict so, after getting hot with the girls, you could chill with the jazz. Christy Smith's quartet was the house band playing in Harry's bar and Christy is a well known local double bass player and a bass teacher at Singapore University. We had a chat during one of the

intervals and I enjoyed listening to him espousing 'music is music' thoughts in his Californian laid back manner. He did offer to let me play his bass during the next set but, to paraphrase Denis Thatcher, better to be thought an incompetent bassist than to pick up a bass and prove it, so I gratefully declined. A great evening, and the girls next door, well that's another story..

Moving on to Jakarta, Indonesia did not present any opportunity but I was looking forward to Brisbane, my next destination, where the Queensland Symphony Orchestra was doing Mahler 5. As this is a favourite of mine I was relishing the thought of listening to this. Due to 'the late arrival of an incoming aircraft' I was late and after checking in I raced down the Queensland Performing Arts Centre. I was about 30 minutes late and after a lot of sucking of teeth it was decided that it was not possible for me to get in so, after watching what looked like an impressive size orchestra perform on a grainy screen in the bar, I went stalking an alternative venue. Luck was in as I came upon a bar called The Joynt that had a wild rockabilly band called Mad Sin playing and after the double bassist was dragged back to the stage from the bar they did a fantastic session. The double bassist was really good on the slap bass and I hope to incorporate a few of his tricks in the next Langtree concert.

Adelaide was too quick a visit to get any culture but Perth was a

different matter. I had a chat with a guy who happened to be staying at my B&B. He was Peter Tanfield, a well known violinist and now Musical Director of Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. What luck, he was conducting his students in a performance of Shostakovich 9 and Brahms 4 the following evening and he seemed keen that I should come along. I persuaded a friend of mine from Houston that I had bumped into in Perth to come along and, after a day of meetings, we got an early meal and a few glasses of wine under our belts before jumping in a cab and getting to Edith Cowan University by the skin of our teeth before the doors closed. Even though I hadn't heard the Shostakovich before, I knew I was enjoying it when I started hyperventilating in some of the complex rhythms of the second movement. The Brahms was well played but they had a very strong upper string section and the cellos and basses did not come through as strongly as perhaps they could have done. One interesting thing was they had professional players distributed through the orchestra but the solos were retained by students and the section leaders were also all students. All in all a fantastic one and a half hours of music.

The following afternoon I started my return to UK, thinking that perhaps I had enjoyed this trip for all the wrong reasons.



FROM POETRY TO POLE DANCING, YOUR NEWSLETTER NEEDS YOU!

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AT A STEADY PACE

Adrian King

What reason to run even half the Grecian distance?
 Fun? I think not.
 Perhaps a natural urge to move
 To break free from the day's chains.
 But to push, to rise, to strain at uncivilised hour
 In dark and winter cold?
 Simple - to face the music!
 The joy of creating sound,
 As part of a melodic team
 Has indescribable rewards;
 The soaring mood of major theme
 The struggles of competing keys
 Depression, ecstasy, calm, - can gain expression
 Through crafted instrumental tone.
 No minor emotions, these
 That find a voice through orchestral finesse.
 But every group needs hard won funds
 So: bolster key and kitty here
 And nurture youthful verve in Aberystwyth.
 But I digress.

Now teach the muscles to act
 Force the breath to perform
 (Sally, Kate, Ann and Jane know well how
 But for strings - a new idea!)
 A stout new pair of running shoes, pounding-ready,
 And newly set alarm for early morning toil
 Herald the set-to, pushing into shape
 Resisting body.
 No escape. Incessant, breathless plodding.
 Snow and frost are underfoot
 Meaning every step I put
 Has potential for a slip
 Or an unsuspecting trip.
 Training finished for the day
 Not nearly ready for the fray.
 Shower then to calm and warm
 Huge relief to banish storm
 And leave behind the plodding gait
 Not yet the day, more nonstop wait...

Between the practice, stretching, sleep
 And careful eating, food for progress,
 The steady running pace a fading image
 For two days more -
 Then out again...
 April arrives. The day has come.
 Soon the running starts for real
 Legs in harness, mental zeal,
 All the clothing, number too,
 Madejski now swings into view.
 Waiting, waiting for the start
 Almost hear my beating heart
 Slowly, slowly to the line
 Essential muscles feeling fine.
 Black bin liner keeps me warm
 As rustling din precedes the storm.
 Final syllable is added
 Now the lines must all be padded:
 Make the metre fit the meter!

Running, running, keep it steady
 Doesn't feel as though I'm ready.
 Cushioned heel to mask the judder
 Steer by instinct, not by rudder
 Plod and plodding pacing endless
 (Lovely trainers! Never spend less!)
 Non-stop quavers five, six, sev'n, eight
 Plodding more, maintain the same rate
 Steady rhythm allegretto
 Smaller paces quite ristretto
 Dare not change, it's obbligato
 Feeling more like molto largo.
 Round the track a last-ditch coda
 Dreaming of a Scotch and soda.
 Molto meno affrettando
 Then the final ritardando.

Stumble at the finish, legs weak, breathing laboured,
 Relief wafts my way and threatens to smother,
 Vision confused, a mental daze,
 Medal placed, goody bag received.
 Loving hands support, and exertion starts to dim.
 Home! Finale! Allegro, ma non troppo!





TEN QUESTIONS

Melissa Ward

1) how did you start playing the violin?

I started to play the recorder aged 6 and a half when we moved to Leeds (after refusing to play it at 5 when my Mum tried to get me to learn it in Reading). When I was 7 years old, the City of Leeds Quartet came to my school. I was so inspired by the experience that I decided to learn to play the violin (after realising that I was too small to play the cello which I loved just as much as the violin). Since then, I have never looked back.

2) do you play any other instruments?

I used to play the piano and am saving up for one at the moment as I miss it.

3) what job do you do?

I work for The Royal College of Physicians in Regent's Park, London as an Examinations Administrator. Yes, the job is as busy as it sounds, if not busier!

4) favourite book?

My favourite book? Hmm, that's a hard one. I love the

Scarpetta series by Patricia Cornwell, but if I have to choose just one book, at the moment it would have to be the final book in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy by Philip Pullman: *The Amber Spyglass*.

5) one unusual thing about you?

People always seem to be surprised when they find out that I love Formula 1. The European Grand Prix in Valencia was a brilliant race (and I was so busy that I only just watched it on Sunday 1st July after studiously avoiding the news for over a week).

6) Desert Island Discs - (list of eight favourites plus the one you'd hold on to if the others were washed away)

Am I allowed to list pop music?! Okay, I'll keep it classical :)

Elgar's Cello Concerto

Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 4

Dvorak's New World Symphony

Rimsky-Korsakov's Russian Easter Festival Overture

Rachmaninov Symphony No. 2

Beethoven Symphony No. 5

Grieg's Holberg Suite

Elgar's Serenade for Strings

I'm a romantic at heart! The one I'd keep if the others washed away? Elgar's Cello Concerto. The first movement is my favourite piece of music in the whole world (so far!).

7) non-musical hobbies

Watching costume dramas such as *Downton Abbey* and the 1995 BBC version of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Silent Witness*, cookery programmes like *Masterchef: The*

Professionals (I adore Michel Roux, Jnr and think he's incredibly talented but down-to-earth), baking sweet treats for friends and family (well, cooking generally, to be fair), eating out (especially with my lovely husband, Dave), reading and dancing. I recently dusted off my tap shoes and forgot how much I enjoyed it (I won the same tap trophy at my dancing school seven years in a row).

8) what would you be if you weren't a musician?

You know, I'm not sure, but I love people and helping others to be the best that they can be is what makes me happiest. It's fair to say that if I don't play my violin regularly I get depressed so I cannot imagine not being a musician. Music is my life (yes, cliched, but true!)

9) what are the challenges (or delights) of leading Langtree?

I love working with Paul, he is constantly inspiring and a mine of useful information. I hope that my love of music and my willingness to help others (despite my crazy lifestyle making me more tired by Wednesday evening), comes across to the members of the orchestra; after all that's why I'm here :)

10) what makes you laugh?

I am very particular about comedy: I either love it or I hate it! Favourite comedians are Bill Bailey, Dara O'Briain, Tim Minchin and Michael McIntyre.

Calendar

September 12th

First rehearsal of new term

