



Newsletter

Issue no.23

October 2009

Diary:

AGM – Sunday 18 Oct (2nd half of rehearsal)

Autumn Concert - 22 Nov in OLSM, 8pm

Brahms – Tragic Overture
Haydn – Trumpet Concerto (soloist tbc)
Sibelius - Symphony no 5

Spring Concert - 21 Mar 2010 in OLSM, 8pm

Conductor – Eugene Monteith
Hamilton Harty –
Comedy Overture
Elgar – Sea Pictures (soloist tbc)
Brahms – Symphony no 1

Workshop

We are planning to hold a workshop on Sunday 11th or Sunday 18th April – date to be confirmed and work to be decided. If you have a special request, please make it to a committee member.

MD News

After nine years of service as our musical director, Brian has indicated that he needs a break from the weekly Sunday rehearsal routine. He has some important other business to attend to during 2010 – his impending wedding to Jen!

He has brought a tremendous amount to the orchestra – nine years' worth of enjoyable Sunday evenings and many fine public performances, covering a wide range of

repertoire. Fortunately, he does NOT want to sever his association with the orchestra, but he will be taking a sabbatical in 2010, during which we will be working with guest conductors.

This is an opportunity for a bit of fresh air all round with a chance for us all to return, renewed and invigorated to our partnership afterwards.

On behalf of the Society, I want to take this opportunity to thank Brian for his musical direction, his jokes (good and bad!) and his unflagging enthusiasm, and to pass on our best wishes for our year apart and married life!

Our Spring 2010 concert will be conducted by Eugene Monteith, who has already taken several of our rehearsals and with whom the orchestra has struck an immediate rapport. Eugene is currently studying Choral Conducting at RWCMD, having already completed a postgraduate diploma in Orchestral Conducting. Recently he has worked as assistant conductor with Welsh National Youth Opera, and acted as chorus master and assistant conductor for RWCMD productions of Suor Angelica and L'Enfant et les Sortilèges. He is very much looking forward to working with us, and the feeling is reciprocated!

Pete

MD Review

The Spring concert was Adrian Cook's first as Leader and presented a huge challenge to guide the strings through the difficulties of Rachmaninov's 2nd Symphony. However he achieved that with skill and enthusiasm. The concert kicked off with Glinka's Overture to Ruslan and Ludmilla and was followed by the Malcolm Arnold Flute Concerto, beautifully performed by Catherine Handley. The Symphony is a challenge for any amateur orchestra, but much of the romantic orchestration was really brought to life. The limited string players (due to size of venue mainly(!) really worked hard under Adrian's leadership to ensure a full orchestral sound was forthcoming from all sections of the ensemble and there was much to be admired from many of the solo lines. The performance brought a spontaneous written note of praise from Noel and Angela Meeke, Friends of AOS, saying how much they enjoyed it and how we brought it off superbly. Thanks for that.

The Summer concert, held in the Angel Hotel's Ballroom, was a popular event, traditional in the sense that the audience was mainly made up of friends and family and included some chamber music.

The concert started with Delius' Summer Night on the River, suitable for what was a humid summer's evening. Delius orchestrates his music carefully, with thin textures and the need for sensitive playing. Woodwind lines play a particularly important role and the melodies were carried well by the section.

Then followed a performance Copland's Appalachian Spring, which is scored for 13 instruments. Again, much sensitive playing was required, but this time with complicated time signatures and nowhere to hide for the players, who had individual lines to perform. This work is a particular favourite of mine and for an amateur group to perform it with only a handful of rehearsals was a testament to the players themselves and also the progress which the society has made in the last few years. It was also nice to welcome an external guest – James Joseph from Abergavenny Music, to complete the line-up by playing the piano part, and we thank him for his fine playing.

Before the second half, but after a visit to the bar for most, it was a pleasure to present the **Bertram Muncaster Shield** to the most improved young player of the year. Adam Harris Adamson joined the society a couple of years ago with his dad, and progressively moved through the ranks of the second violins and established himself in the first violins during the last season. The shield has no room for more names so from this year is being supplemented with a certificate and voucher to spend in Abergavenny Music. Adam

was presented with the award by Anne Muncaster who continues to offer generous support. Thank you, Anne.

And then it was onto Beethoven's Second Symphony, music very much suited for a space like the Ballroom. I took some of the speeds a little quicker than in rehearsal, leading to edge of the seat but a dedicated and very exciting performance. Again, a testament to the maturing of the society that such a fine performance could be given after only a handful of Sunday night rehearsals.

It would be remiss of me not to thank the members of the society for allowing me to take a sabbatical year off before I get married in August 2010. After nine years, I hope that the orchestra will welcome the opportunity to work with some other conductors for a season. I also hope that they will learn something new, even if the guest conductors end up saying the same old stuff as I say (week in, week out) in a different way.

And I really look forward to returning for a workshop in April and then joining up again in 2011, re-energised and invigorated – and of course as a married man!!

Brian

New members

During this year we have welcomed new members Tom Cunningham (2nd violin), Sophia Rigby (viola) and Jonathan Turzynski (trumpet). It is terrific to have more young players in the orchestra.

Fantastic exam results

Firstly, a long time ago now, Ian Smith used the time freed

up by stepping down as Chairman to great effect by gaining a 1st class honours degree in History from the Open University. Congratulations, Ian.

In the summer Sophie Rigby achieved 9 A*s and 2 As at GCSE and David Smith (cello) was awarded 3 grade As at A level. David has now gone to Birmingham to study sociology whilst Sophie is continuing her education at King Henry.

Members leaving

Barbara Price has decided she can no longer manage all her musical commitments and unfortunately we are the orchestra which will lose her after more than 30 years. As a result she has stepped down as Librarian after at least 15 years loyal service. A senior librarian by profession, Barbara not only sourced our hired music each term, but made sure there were enough parts for everyone at the concert – not as straightforward as you might imagine! She also brought the rehearsal music each week (as well as her Double Bass, stool and stand). Most importantly, Barbara completely overhauled our music library, removing sets which were incomplete or so dogeared as to be unplayable, reboxing in sturdy box files which will ensure the music remains in good condition, and cataloguing the whole collection. We will miss her professionalism ... and her banter with Brian.

Jean Bradley has also decided to hang up her bow after over 30 years in the orchestra. She wrote saying the standard has improved beyond measure from when she joined and her "fingers aren't so nimble now!"

However she will keep in touch and be happy to continue to provide refreshments on concert days to anyone in need. "I think we are incredibly lucky to have an orchestra in Abergavenny which has been such an asset to local students intending to take up music (Gill was only 10 when she joined)."

For many years Jean was Treasurer and was awarded Life Membership in recognition of her service to the Society. You will be missed, Jean, but we hope to see you at concerts.

Ian Smith has not been a member for so long, but contributed enormously as principal bassoon, Chairman, Friends' Secretary and fall guy for MD's jokes. He has sight problems which are exacerbated in low light conditions making it very difficult to read the music. However he hopes to join us for interval drinks in the Angel occasionally.

Peter Bray (trumpet) has left to study music at Dartington College of Arts. His parting shot was a play through of (most of) his 'Battle Symphony' which had interesting moments and challenges not all associated with the key signatures! Good luck with your composition, Peter.

Pat and Fred Henderson have decided to give rehearsals a miss through the winter, but hope to come again when the evenings get lighter again. Fred is suffering with a crushed vertebra in his back and they both find low light difficult but otherwise they are well and will miss playing the Sibelius.

Summer Social

The second summer barbecue (held in the St Michaels Centre on Friday 19 June after the summer concert) was again enjoyed by the 20 or so who attended, providing a convivial opportunity for fun and chat.

New Look Website

Simon Large has kept our website up to date for several years and is now in the process of giving it a fresher 'look and feel'. Some new photos would help it along so if you have any we don't know about – or have ideas for or knowhow for providing graphics, please let Simon know. Indeed any ideas for improving the site would be welcome.

Music Stand Lights

Martin Bailey Wood (oboe) has suggested a bulk order of stand lights to reduce the cost to individuals, so see Martin if you want to take part.

Wye Valley Music

Look out for chamber concerts organised by this organisation – usually in St Briavels or Wyastone. See www.wyevalleymusic.org.uk

Chamber Music Courses

I have details of chamber music courses (primarily for established quartets but they may accommodate individuals) at Frensham Heights, Surrey in April. Please see me if you want a brochure.

Editorial apology

I do apologise, particularly to Friends of the Society, for the lack of Newsletters this year. I hope this one brings you up to date and I shall endeavour to be more diligent next year.

Sue Rogers