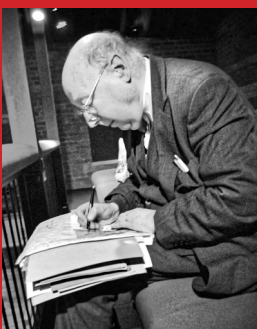


Drawn to Music



Recently, Raphael Wallfisch gave Ronald Stein permission to sketch him during a rehearsal for a LCMS concert. Leon Levy asked Ronald to tell us something about himself, his influences and his sketching career.

Born in London's Soho, I was drawing on the pavement outside my parents' shop aged three. Inside the shop I was serving customers such as Constant Lambert and Augustus John, whose portrait of Madame Suggia later influenced one of my cello sketches. Another client was Horace de Vere Cole, Master Practical Joker, whose only pupil I still am. Subsequently, I attended St. Martins School of Art, where I was advised either to become a pupil of Henry Moore, as my drawings were sculptural in nature, or to join his Studio, which I did, becoming his Personal Assistant.

At the same time, having been influenced by the drawings of Raymond Kapp, who was sketching the LPO members, I started my own part-time career, mainly recording musical activities in London in the 1940s. I sketched the two resident orchestras at the Cambridge Theatre, together with international soloists. I also attended rehearsals of their opera productions, with Carl Ebert directing such stars as Mariano Stabile in 'Falstaff', and met a number of composers including Francis Poulenc, who compared notes with me about Indian ink.

Besides all these riches, my mother's cousin was Sidney Torch, founder of the BBC Concert Orchestra. I sketched him and his Queens Hall Light Orchestra at Abbey Road Studios, with famous players, such as Dennis Brain, in his orchestral line-up.

I also sketched the LSO at rehearsals at the Royal Albert Hall. I attended the broadcasts of the BBC Concert Orchestra, sketching many famous soloists, including Bryn Turfel, Julian Lloyd-Webber, Juan Diego Flóres, Andrea Bocelli and Arturo Pizarro. I have been given a special Gallery section of the BBC Concert Orchestra Supporters' Club website, which is filled with many of my sketches. At the BBC Maida Vale Studios, I sketched the BBC Symphony Orchestra and leading artists such as Kiri te Kanawa.

I was commissioned to record the rehearsal of the LSO with 300-strong choir and soloists in Berlioz 'Grande Messe des Morts' at St. Paul's Cathedral by my friend Jan Pascal Tortelier, whose father I sketched in 1948 on his 34th birthday. The Choirmaster of Magdalen College, Oxford, Bill Ives, also commissioned me to sketch the choir from the organ loft.

From a long list of choirs, orchestras and soloists I have also sketched Piatigorsky, Segovia, Ginnette Neveau, Albert Coates, Isaac Stern, Barry Wordsworth (who has my sketch of him and Arturo Pizarro on his office wall in the ROH), and recently, Lang Lang (at a masterclass) and Alfred Brendel (at a lecture/recital), plus, of course, various LCMS artists at Kings Place.

I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to sketch all these superb artistes, but I sometimes need two or three sessions to get a person's movements and expressions 'right'. I find violinists are usually the most difficult, as they tend to move all over the place, and I have to build up a position that I think is most representative of that particular performer.

I would still like to sketch Lang Lang actually playing. Having sketched Isaac Stern, I would like to add Itzhak Perlman or Pinchas Zukerman to my 'collection'. I am still haunted by not having taken the opportunity of sketching Sir Malcolm Sargent and Sir Clifford Curzon at the Royal Albert Hall. I seem to remember that Curzon was humming to himself off-key, and that might have put me off.



Allegri Quartet. Sketch: Ronald Stein

My Story



Photo: Horst Kofo

The violinist Ben Sayevich launches *Chamber Music Notes'* new series in which musicians talk about their instrument. LCMS looks forward to hearing Ben and the rest of the Rosamunde Trio playing Concert 1 of their complete Beethoven Piano Trio series at Kings Place in November 2012.

Did I choose the violin, or did it choose me? My parents took me to hear David Oistrakh when I was just six years old. He played the Khachaturian Concerto, and after the concert I was sleepless for three nights. The sound kept resonating in my ears, and eventually I asked my father, who was a dance choreographer, to take me to a music school where I could study the violin. There were other musicians in the family. My older brother was a jazz pianist, and I had tried to imitate his tunes on the piano. But after the Oistrakh concert, that all changed.

The school, Churlionis Art School and Performing Arts, was located in Vilnius, in Lithuania (then part of the Soviet Union). It was the only professional training school in the arts in Lithuania, and very competitive. I was only seven years old. The curriculum embraced a wide spectrum of the arts and sciences, so I had to study mathematics and literature, as well as all musical subjects, including the history of instruments and their performance. My supervisor demanded that I spend several hours of each morning in practice. Woe to anyone who shirked that responsibility!

I played a quarter-size violin until the age of 13 or so, when I took up a full-size instrument. I have played many violins since then, but only now at the age of 52 have I found a perfect match for me. I have been very finicky, but I found my Carlo Giuseppe Antonio Testore, dating from 1697, Milano, in Chicago just within the last year. Purchasing it demanded a great sacrifice, but it is now indispensable to me. It produces a wonderful palette of sounds whose variability best matches my own imagination. It is my partner in music. I have it with me now, and I would not part with it. It makes great demands on me, and I have to constantly adjust the sound post and the bridge according to the weather and humidity conditions. This requires my attention every day. The resin from the strings accumulates, and I have to be

very careful to make sure that the varnish is not damaged.

Since my early studies, I realized I had an attraction and affinity to the virtuosic repertoire, such as Paganini, Sarasate and Wieniawsky; however, I have also enjoyed with the passing years music that displays a more sensitive and profound depth, what I find in Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Berg, and Stravinsky. In other words, I have very catholic tastes, and it is difficult to single out individual pieces. But I can say that as I grow older, music of this kind of subtlety and sophistication—music that does not only curry immediate favour with the public—has a greater and lasting value to me.

The important thing is that music—particularly music played by the violin—is a universal expression, whether it originates from folk traditions or, more specifically, klezmer traditions.

I am fortunate to enjoy many special memories of my performances. One in particular stands out. In 1985 in Boston with the New England Conservatory Orchestra I performed the Berg Concerto. It was a special event, since it was part of the Alban Berg Centennial. I studied it for that event, under the recommendation and tutelage of Louis Krasner, who was the dedicatee of the work (and the first to perform it publicly).

As an educator at several institutions, including the University of Kansas and, at present, Park University, I have found many challenges in cultivating the students' general feeling of music and, at the same time, respecting and encouraging their individual expression—both in performance and in their conceptualising the music. I emphasise and encourage them to study chamber music as a crucial element in their journey toward a well-rounded career. I like to think that my own participation in chamber music playing serves as an example to them. Although I do both, I have found in the last few years more opportunities for chamber rather than solo performance.

In conclusion, I recall something my mother once told me, which I have never forgotten. "Only the violin," she said, "of all the instruments, can shed a tear. It can sigh like an angel, or it can rage like a demon—all within the space of a few seconds."

Members' Voices

Suddenly Like Nosebleeds



Photo: Gary Kennard

Ruth Valentine is a poet and long-time attendee at the Sunday-night concerts. Here she reflects on the experience of listening to music.

The Shostakovich second piano trio begins very quietly, the high notes of the cello like someone gasping for breath. I first heard it last year, in the LCMS series; I remember holding my breath myself as the fugue opened out. A few days later I was in the wonderful Harold Moore's in Great Marlborough Street, having the kind of discussion you can have in very few music shops now; and I came home with the CD (the Kempf Trio).

In fact I haven't listened to it that often; it's too painful for an ordinary evening's relaxation. But just three days ago, I heard the trio at Kings Place again, this time with the Shaham-Erez-Wallfisch Trio. Knowing already that a piece has an astonishing beginning means by definition that you can't be astonished again, or not for the same reasons. This time I was far more aware of the structure; there was the quite different pleasure of understanding the workings.

I've been thinking a lot lately about live music, and recorded music, and what I really want to hear. My first take on the question was: I want to be surprised. In fact, I think that's not the right word; what I want is to be startled out of my everyday attitude. So the first hearing of the Shostakovich trio counts, and so does the second; but after that?

In February 1927, Virginia Woolf, a great lover of music, wrote in her journal:

How we protect ourselves from the elements! Coming back last night I thought, owing to civilisation, I, who am now cold, wet & hungry, can be warm & satisfied & listening to a Mozart 4tet in 15 minutes. And so I was.

Few of us now would have her grateful astonishment. And as for Shostakovich, finishing his trio in 1944: he would have been – what? astonished? pleased? appalled? – to learn how easily and how often we can hear it now.

Illuminating Notes



It's been my privilege to write the concert programme notes for LCMS since they were introduced in 2008/09. Not only do I get to write about the classics of the chamber repertory, but I also discover lesser-known gems I wouldn't otherwise think to seek out.

Looking back over the past four seasons (and the 359 works for which I've written notes), I'm particularly glad to have encountered several pieces and composers: the beautiful if challenging music of Wolfgang Rihm; Grace Rossiter's mesmeric setting of 'The Angel Gabriel'; Leo Brouwer's Afro-Cuban-tinged 'Guitar Quintet'; George Antheil's Third String Quartet; and any of Johann Nepomuk Hummel's chamber arrangements of the symphonies of Mozart and Beethoven. It's an eclectic list, thanks to the Society's enterprising artistic direction and, of course, the ensembles that perform for it each week.

For me, the best programme note illuminates a work's structure so it can be followed on the first listen. I also like to learn something, be it some insight into what else the composer was doing at the time or another anecdotal detail from their biography. The genre or medium of the piece being performed nearly always merits some attention, too. (This third aspect is something of a fixation of mine, being related to my

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am not complaining, or wanting a return to the wind-up gramophone of my childhood. But I do find that the ubiquity of music, the ease of access, makes me less rather than more open to it. I want to be startled, and am harder to startle. There are pieces that I simply don't want to hear, because there's no startle left in them for me. I don't want to be *charmed*; I don't want to be thinking that some piece is *amazing considering* that the composer was only three, or had already written 20 quartets that week, or was dying of a surfeit of lampreys. Or, to be less flippant, I don't want to hear something I've worn out by over-listening.

In the past week, as well as hearing the Shostakovich, I took the decision to stop writing poetry, at least until I'm writing because I want to, not because I always have, or because it's become a civic duty, like recycling the newspaper. I'm not entirely sure what the connection is. I've written poetry seriously since 1986, though with some barren periods. It may be that being tetchy about both my own bad poems and other people's un-startling music is a symptom of age. I may be using both stopping writing and being fussy about concerts as a paradoxical injunction: what you forbid yourself becomes more tempting.

What has all this to do with LCMS? I hope for the Society's sake that I'm not its typical member. I'm not a weekly attendee. I never have been. At Conway Hall I turned up arbitrarily, when I'd decided to half an hour before, or because I knew I'd meet friends, or once because I'd just that afternoon had a melodramatic break-up with a man in New Cross Gate. I loved the ramshackleness of Conway Hall, and the sense of the audience as the (diminishing) Communist Party at prayer. I miss how readily I was overwhelmed by what I heard, just as I miss having poems come on me suddenly like nosebleeds.

Kings Place is wonderful. Ideally the weather's mild enough for a stroll onto the terrace and a gaze at the narrow-boats, as a kind of preparatory meditation. I like rushing into the building just in time to get a bagel or some soup to sustain me till the 259 gets me home. There are usually friends (the same Conway Hall friends) to catch up with. And then the somehow calming sight of the wood panelling; the smell of the wood; the faint sounds of tuning up from back-stage; the always enigmatic sight of apparently ordinary people, though in posh clothes, coming in holding their instruments in that delicate, casual way. A pause; the thin, high, strange notes of a cello...



Cover illustration: Gary Kennard

Ruth Valentine's book of poetry 'On the Saltmarsh' will be published in October 2012 (Smokestack Books).

research into the heritage of musical types: Arnold Schoenberg's 'Pierrot' ensemble and John Field's invention of the nocturne, for example.)

I try to strike a balance between these areas. Naturally, it's easier to achieve this with some works than others. Indeed, at the earliest stage of research, the availability of recordings and even scores is not always guaranteed, despite the marvels of Naxos Music Library, Oxford Music Online, and a certain rainforest-themed e-retailer. At other times, the challenge is instead to sift through, and dare not to be overwhelmed by, the wealth of scholarship that already exists.

Surprisingly, perhaps, only one concertgoer has ever taken me to task—an avid fan of Schubert whose knowledge of the prolific Austrian far exceeded mine (I welcome such correspondence). Looking ahead to future seasons, I'm hopeful for the programming of further Shostakovich quartets (after this season's marvelous Beethoven/Shostakovich cycle), any of the quartets of Beethoven, Haydn, Dvořák and Bartók I haven't yet written about, or the reoccurrence of composers I'd probably count among my favourites: Chopin, Paul Hindemith, Schoenberg and Peter Maxwell Davies.

Dr. Christopher Dromey
Senior Lecturer in Music, Middlesex University, whose most recent book 'The Pierrot Ensembles: Chronicle and Catalogue, 1912-2012' will be published by Plumbago later this year.

CHAMBER MUSIC NOTES

ISSUE 6 AUTUMN 2012

The LCMS Newsletter



Photo: Sarah Hamant

Welcome!

The Brodsky Quartet's stirring Shostakovich finale to our past season is still fresh in my mind as I introduce this latest issue of *Chamber Music Notes* and contemplate what's to come in the autumn.

As always, Peter Fribbins, our Artistic Director, sets the scene in 'Behind the Notes' with highlights of the programme. It will include the Rosamunde Trio, whose violinist Ben Sayevich has contributed a thoughtful article launching a *Chamber Music Notes* series on musicians and their instruments. Musical instruments feature in another article. In the latest 'Leon Levy Meets...' series, Sarah-Jane Bradley reveals her love for her George Adolph Chanot viola.

A number of items in this issue illustrate a link between music and other arts. Composer Simon Holt, whose 'Two movements for the string quartet' we heard in March, is inspired by literature and, potentially, 'everything I come across!' Chris Bradshaw considers a recent book, 'Music for Silenced Voices', one writer's response to Shostakovich's string quartets. And Chris' article is illuminated by the artist Adam Birtwistle's portrait of Shostakovich, a haunting presence when it was projected onto the wall of Hall One during the Brodsky Quartet's performances. In 'Drawn to Music' Ronald Stein describes his passion for sketching performing musicians.

Of course, there are other gems to be found here, such as an interview with Robin Ashwell, violist of the Sacconi Quartet; a member's reflections on the experience of listening to music; an informative piece by the author of our concert programme notes; and introductions to two fascinating members of the LCMS/Kings Place community.

Finally, I am delighted to call attention to a momentous milestone: this year marks the 40th anniversary of the Chilingirian Quartet. Levon Chilingirian, our LCMS President, and Philip de Groote, cello, are the original founder members, and are joined by Ronald Birks, violin, and Susie Mészáros, viola. Together they have thrilled and entertained us with their vibrant interpretations of both the traditional repertoire and less-heard pieces, and have introduced us to completely new works by new composers. Apart from playing in concert halls around the world they are the Quartet in Residence at the Royal College of Music, and also coach young players through their connection with the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra in Venezuela, pioneers of the *El Sistema* programme. Warm congratulations!

Neil Johnson
Executive Chairman

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Fifth Piano Quartet. Photo: Chris Neillgrigham

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Behind the Notes

Our 2012/13 series, the fifth in our new venue of Kings Place (where does the time go?), opens on October 7 with the wonderful Emperor Quartet performing Haydn and Britten, and also Schubert's dramatic 'Death and the Maiden' quartet. Other quartets in the autumn include the Allegri Quartet in the penultimate concert of their epic survey of the Beethoven and Shostakovich quartets – preceded by another of Robert Hanson's invaluable pre-concert talks, illustrated live by the quartet – and the Carducci Quartet, who feature Malcolm Lipkin's impressive 'Variations on a theme of Bartók' to celebrate Malcolm's 80th birthday this year.

We also have some quartets 'plus one': the Barbirolli Quartet return after their marvelous premiere in the LCMS series last year, this time joined by clarinetist Janet Hilton in a programme of clarinet quintets. In addition, the Chilingirian Quartet continue their Romantic piano quintet series, on this occasion with famous French pianist Philippe Cassard in the sublime César Franck quintet, in a programme that also includes Hugh Wood's intriguingly named 'Quartet No. 0' – an early work from the 1950s that he has recently re-worked and added to his quartet oeuvre.

Our autumn also includes three international piano trios, beginning with the excellent Rosamunde Trio on November 11, who are starting what is likely to be a memorable four-concert series of Beethoven's piano trios. On tour from Austria, the Vienna Mozart Trio will perform Schubert's heavenly Eb trio, and in December the impressive Sitkovetsky Piano Trio return to the LCMS with a programme of Mozart, Brahms and Dvořák's mighty F minor trio.

Continuing the Russian theme, we are lucky to have the celebrated cellist Leonid Gorokhov (now based in Hanover) and wonderful pianist Olga Vinokur (now based in New York) in a wide-ranging programme to include Rachmaninov's Cello Sonata.

We also welcome back the Frith Piano Quartet, whose programme will include Mozart, Brahms' passionate C minor Piano Quartet, and the beautiful 'Four Lullabies' by the British composer Matthew Taylor.

It's going to be a great autumn of Sunday concerts.

Peter Fribbins, Artistic Director

A Lonely But Essential Place

Simon Holt's 'Two movements for string quartet' was played by the Tippett Quartet in an LCMS concert on 11 March 2012. Walter Rudeloff questions Simon about his influences and inspirations and his feelings about composing chamber music.



Photo: Andrej Urbanik

Walter Rudeloff As a starter, what would you say have been the major influences that played a part in your becoming a composer?

Simon Holt I always find this very difficult to answer as I feel that whatever I come across has some kind of influence on me. I'm too sponge-like in many ways and too easily seduced by all areas of the arts. I spend long periods really questioning what I'm getting myself into when it comes to new ideas. Certainly studying art at school (musically speaking, I only studied the organ at school, but with an inspirational teacher, Norman Harper, who had been a student of Gillian Weir's. I did neither 'O' nor 'A' level music) was a major, enriching and focusing period in my early life. I have always listened to as much music from all areas of musical life as I could possibly get my hands on.

WR Have literary influences been of more importance in your chamber works?

SH Mostly, yes, but I'm open to all kinds of possibilities and will take 'inspiration' from wherever I can get it. Everything I come across has some kind of potential, and I feel that it's only through lack of imagination that it can go unnoticed. So eyes and ears open at all times, please; you might miss a trick!

WR In the case of the 'Two movements for string quartet', there was the poetry of Emily Dickinson. Was the poem the basis of inspiration for this composition?

SH Without any doubt at all, yes. It was never far away from my side when writing the piece. If I got stuck, I would return to it, always trying to find a clue as to where to go next.

WR Many of your pieces appear to have literary connections. Does the reading of a poem (or other literary work) inform the impetus for composition or is it more complicated?

SH It can definitely be an impetus, but I find the next step, the actual (usually improvised) notes from the main impetus for the piece.

WR Could you say something about other composers or 'schools' that

you are fond of or that have been influential?

SH I have quite a few yardsticks as regards quality control more than influence. Xenakis and Feldman are important figures, but I doubt that what I do sounds in any way like them. I also think of Giacometti when I'm worrying if something is good enough. He aimed spectacularly high, and I try to, but feel like an ant in comparison, as if I'm playing at it, whereas he truly lived his work in a very profound way. Aiming for the stars is a prerequisite for anybody thinking about writing music; otherwise, what's the point?

WR The Tippett Quartet has premiered some pieces by you?

SH No, they haven't actually premiered anything ...yet. But, they have picked up on the 'Two movements for string quartet' and, in many ways, made the piece their own.

WR Could you say anything about their style or character that you take into account when composing a quartet?

SH In fact, I wrote the piece for the Belcea Quartet, and it was premiered in Cheltenham at the festival there when Michael Berkeley was the artistic director. He was a great support to me during his tenure. I just wrote the piece I had to write. I was very much enthralled by Emily Dickinson's poetry at that time, and the piece became part of a large cycle of pieces based on her work.

WR By way of contrast with other genres, what does chamber music mean for you as a composer?

SH It's a place where I can completely be my private self. It's a lonely place in many ways, but an essential place to nurture ideas and experiment with the obsession of the moment, whatever that may be.

WR Is it a medium for projecting ideas, emotions, states of being, that other genres just cannot reach?

SH In a word, yes. I still find the orchestra relatively unwieldy, but that is slowly changing for the better, and I'm gaining in confidence there, also. Very different place, but not without its challenges. No challenge, no piece!

Leon Levy Meets Sarah-Jane Bradley



Photo: Claire Huish

After my recent excursions to the wilds of South London, I ventured due north to South Mimms to interview Sarah-Jane Bradley, viola player par excellence.

Sarah-Jane was born in Bristol into an eminent and cultured family of Polish/Russian/Jewish origins. Her grandfather was a psychiatrist who pioneered group therapy and was known as an authority on Wagner. Although he died when she was 12, he provided her with her first contacts with music, and she has inherited his collection of records.

She moved at an early age to London, where her father was a senior lecturer in physiology. Her mother was a schoolteacher—first of languages and then piano. Her home was always full of music, and when she was seven she started to play the piano and dreamed of becoming a concert pianist. The violin followed a year later; and at the age of 12, Sarah-Jane met her future viola teacher John White at a county music course, and switched to the viola, together with piano and composition.

Why the viola? The simple answer is that her school orchestra needed a viola player, and this enabled her to discover what she considers to be the deeper and more mellow sound of that instrument. Also, she was attracted by the novelty factor: as no one else was playing it at school, it had the appeal of being "a bit different". She found playing with the National Youth Orchestra at this stage of her career a very formative experience, and went on to study viola at the Royal Academy of Music followed by two years in Salzburg with Thomas Riebl.

Her first entry into the commercial world came in 1992 with the Leopold String Trio, and her career took off with tours to Europe, the USA and South America. She then joined another all-female group, the Sorrel Quartet, and, as a prize-winner at the Lionel Tertis viola competition, launched her solo career at St. John's, Smith Square. This was followed by the Wigmore Hall and many other concerts and recitals, notably in Spain, where she became a firm favourite.

Sarah-Jane is becoming increasingly well known as a pioneer of 20th-century music and is passionate about British composers. David Matthews has dedicated his viola concerto to her, 'Winter Remembered'; and part of our interview was conducted against the atmospheric

background of her recording of Arthur Benjamin's 'Elegy, Waltz and Toccata' for viola and orchestra, which was composed in 1945 and reflects the dark days of the war.

She is not drawn to avant-garde music, which she finds too undisciplined, preferring a more lyrical approach and to work within boundaries set by the composer. This enables her to identify with the intentions of the composer and communicate them to the audience.

We discussed the different venues she has played in. The important thing is to respond to the environment of a particular concert hall and perhaps take more risks, which leads to a more exciting performance. She is a great fan of Kings Place. The artists' facilities are excellent but it is the hall itself which attracts her most with the caveat that the clear acoustic can sometimes be disconnecting for string players.

I asked about her interests outside the viola, and Richard Strauss operas was an immediate reply. Also, a love of language, especially French, and of course her two young children (both musical) take up much of her time. She also likes old-fashioned chivalry in a man. A busy life certainly, such that practising and learning new works have sometimes become a small-hours occupation.

And what about dislikes? Confrontation figures high on her list, as does snobbishness, which she has often come across in the world of music. She has no time for pure effect or showiness in performance. The performer's job is to interpret and communicate the music to the listener without self-indulgence and to draw the audience in.

She acquired her current instrument in 1993. Made by the English luthier George Adolph Chanot in 1896, it follows in the French tradition and is modelled on Ruggierius. She fell in love with it immediately, and she prefers it to the smaller Amati instrument that was lent to her two years ago. The Chanot has a big stop and a dark quality and variable temperament, which bring it alive and add to its attraction.

I took the plunge and mentioned viola jokes, but Sarah-Jane was unperturbed. It appears that in Mozart's day, the violin was the top-notch instrument at court and the viola a mere runner-up. Notable composers who played the viola include Mozart (it was his favourite instrument!), Dvořák and Smetana, and her repertoire and discography attest to the fact that it is by no means neglected, especially these days, by composers and performers alike. It is not to be underestimated, and in Sarah-Jane's hands it certainly holds its own.

South Mimms is an area blighted by motorway networks, but Sarah-Jane Bradley's house is a haven of culture, thoughtfulness, the practice and enjoyment of music and of life in general, and I was happy to continue our interview beyond the allotted time. It was a great pleasure to hear Sarah-Jane play at a recent LCMS concert. It was an even greater pleasure to talk to this vibrant young musician, surely destined for a great career.

Books

'Music for Silenced Voices: Shostakovich and His Fifteen Quartets' by Wendy Lesser. Yale University Press.

Chris Bradshaw has read an 'absorbing' book about the composer's life and quartets. *Chamber Music Notes* invites readers to send us their own responses to books about music.

I don't normally read much about music – reviews and articles maybe and of course our excellent LCMS programme notes, but in general I prefer to listen to it. However, I was introduced last year to an absorbing book that perhaps will prompt me to branch out further!

This book, about Shostakovich and his quartets, ties in well with the Brodsky Quartet series earlier this season: 'The Musical Diaries of Shostakovich'.* His widow thought of the quartets as Shostakovich's diary entries, reflecting the historical, political, artistic and personal events of his life.

Lesser tracks the biography of Shostakovich and shows us how these events may have impacted on this amazing body of work, the 15 string quartets, written between 1938 and 1970. Each quartet is dealt with individually and chronologically against a backdrop of his life at the time of composition and performance.

Life during this composition period covered pivotal moments and movements in Russia – the Stalinist regime, the restrictions of work and travel, the fear of detention, the obligation to follow the party line. Shostakovich's health also fluctuated, and in later years he was virtually bedridden for lengthy periods.

He seems to have been something of a maverick, a man of opposites: hated and loved in his country; a very private person living a very public life; music that pleased many but was largely just for himself. His symphonies and operas were often influenced by Soviet government demands, but his quartets went largely unnoticed.

Lesser mostly keeps her personal analysis of the quartets rather apart from the biography; yet it all interweaves in a very readable format.

*Adam Birtwistle produced the Shostakovich painting shown here—his latest in a line of composer paintings—to mark the Brodsky's Shostakovich series. Information on the artist is available from Robert Travers, Piano Nobile Gallery, www.piano-nobile.com



ADAM BIRTWISTLE (b.1959) Shostakovich, 2012 (Tempera and gouache on linen paper 120 x 110 cm)

written at his summer dacha (supplied by Stalin), is an ambitious five-movement work, and probably does reflect his stability at the time; but No.6, written after his beloved Nina died, has an unexpected, certain playful, hopeful quality, which perhaps doesn't match his bereavement. Lesser suggests that No. 8 is the least autobiographical of the quartets; yet Shostakovich called it a "memorial to himself."

It is difficult to appreciate fully the restrictions under which Shostakovich wrote, with concerts cancelled by the authorities, new works shelved as being too unconventional, and frequent domestic hardships. Lesser depicts this background very well. The authorities were prying, and intercepted letters and meetings. Shostakovich's sense of humour, sometimes labelled 'ironic', means that musical jokes and puns were occasionally included in his work, or he included musical coded references. In a sense, I feel it doesn't matter if you don't recognise the musical quotations and allusions but just respond to the music. The biographical details will then complete the picture at a later date, adding depth to one's appreciation.

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*Adam Birtwistle produced the Shostakovich painting shown here—his latest in a line of composer paintings—to mark the Brodsky's Shostakovich series. Information on the artist is available from Robert Travers, Piano Nobile Gallery, www.piano-nobile.com

Chris Bradshaw Talks to Robin Ashwell

In January this year LCMS's first concert of 2012 was given by the Sacconi Quartet—Ben Hancox (violin), Hannah Dawson (violin), Robin Ashwell (viola) and Cara Berridge (cello)—playing Haydn's 'Lobkowitz' quartet, Bartok's Quartet No. 3 and Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden' quartet. This wonderful programme heralded the anniversary of their tenth year playing together (their first concert was in January 2002), and we want to congratulate them on this milestone. I personally remember them playing at the RCM in the early years and wondering, somewhat expectantly, what their future might be... and here they are. Congratulations!



In a recent conversation with Robin I asked him what plans the Quartet had for their anniversary year. "We're performing the programme that we performed for LCMS throughout the year. This encapsulates three pillars of the quartet repertoire, three pieces that are particularly special to us. We have always enjoyed performing Haydn – he is so witty and inventive, and there are surprises around every turn of phrase. Bartók's string quartets have always spoken to us on a very deep level. And Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden' is the ultimate all-powerful piece of writing for any genre."

The Quartet also has a well-established Sacconi Chamber Music Festival in Folkestone each year over a long weekend in May, forming a central part of their season. This year it promises to be a focal part of the anniversary celebration. As Robin describes: "We get to invite our favourite musician colleagues to perform with us, and in their own right. The rest of the season is all planned around that weekend of concerts. We have a fantastic, lively audience, who come down to Folkestone for the whole weekend, making it a really social as well as musical

experience for performers and audience members alike. Creating both the festival and our own record label are two of the things I am most proud of."

Looking back over their ten years the Quartet can identify some significant landmarks, but one particular concert stands out for them – a 2011 concert at Westminster School with Guy Johnston (cello) performing Schubert 'Quartett-Statz', Beethoven first Rasmusovsky and Schubert Quintet. In addition, there have been nearly 20 world and UK premieres over their ten years, most recently by John McCabe, Paul Patterson, Timothy Salter and Stephen Deazley.

The Sacconi's Wigmore debut was in 2004, when they performed Bartók's first quartet. Robin remembers the full house and electric atmosphere, and likens it to the dynamic feel of the LCMS concert this year. Indeed, Kings Place and Wigmore Hall are the Quartet's favourite performing venues. "Each has a vibrant and warm sound that lifts our spirits as performers, which then feeds back into the performance itself. We have performed in the Brahms-Saal in Vienna's Musikverein, and also the Liceo de Cámara in Madrid and l'Auditori in Barcelona, all of which were superb. Holywell Music Room in Oxford is incredibly special, and the new concert hall at Sevenoaks School is spectacular."

The Quartet's first lessons were with the Chilingirian Quartet and Ani Schnarch at the RCM, and they also studied with the Wihan Quartet, Simon Rowland-Jones and Paavo Pohjola in Finland. Perhaps the greatest influence over the last eight years has been Gábor Takács-Nagy: Robin describes him as "one of the finest, most creative musicians on the

planet, and he always unlocks us and lifts our performance."

Musicians spend vast amounts of time in rehearsal to reach the high standard expected in international venues, and the Sacconi are also generous with their time given to education work, workshops, and schools and family concerts. The Quartet meets four to five days a week to rehearse and perform, usually rehearsing together in the afternoon and practising individually in the morning. When the concert diary is busy, it is hard to fit in enough time together and individually, but they feel they have a good balance between concerts and rehearsal/practice time. And Robin at least is a Lake District walker to offset all those notes!

Having just read a book about another, much older quartet, I was interested in how a younger ensemble solves difference of interpretation: "All ideas must be tried out, with conviction, by the group. After that, it is a case of deciding what works best and what we think is closest to the composer's intentions. Sometimes you have to be prepared to accept things in a different way to how you would interpret them yourself. However, we are always questioning our interpretations and the musical decisions we have taken, so even if a decision goes against your preference one day, it may have swung back to yours a week later."

Of favourite composers, Beethoven is "the king" for Robin, but Vaughan Williams is another firm choice, and the Sacconi hope that the Second Quartet will be programmed in the future. We look forward to that!

Our best wishes to Ben, Hannah, Robin and Cara for the next ten years of music making.

Getting to Know You

Introducing members of the LCMS/Kings Place community.



Emrah Tokalac

Marketing Manager, KPMF With a BA in Management, diploma in voice training (baritone), MA in Musicology, and five years' experience as an advertising account executive and copywriter, Emrah Tokalac left his hometown, Istanbul, in 2004 for further studies in the UK. His research on the solo songs of Finnish composer Jean Sibelius resulted in a Ph.D. in

Musicology in 2010.

Aiming for a career change, Emrah joined Kings Place as Print Assistant in 2009, following an internship in the marketing department, and was promoted to Marketing Executive, and then recently to Marketing Manager. Coordination of the LCMS programme handbills and seasonal leaflets are two of Emrah's many responsibilities, seeing him liaise with the LCMS administrative team on a regular basis. Although art song is his favourite genre in music, when it comes to performance, Emrah prefers choral music. He has been a singing member of the Royal Choral Society since 2005, and since 2007 also serves as a Director on the Executive Board.

For Emrah, studying has always been something to cherish, and nowadays he fills in the gap by learning Italian and supporting his wife in further studies in history. He enjoys Nordic music, maps and atlases, European city breaks (when he's got the time and the resources), and, last but not least, culinary activities as a true Mediterranean. Come and say "Merhaba!"* if you spot him in the concert foyer on a Sunday. **"Hello!"



Helen Jones

Front of House Team, Kings Place You can often see Helen Jones working on the doors to Hall One on a Sunday night. She particularly enjoys working at the LCMS concerts because the regular customers are so friendly and for the very high standard of the performances that LCMS always brings to Kings Place. Helen has occasionally become a member of the

audience on the odd night off from work. Helen enjoys a wide variety of music. Her love of classical began at a very early age, when her parents took her to see a memorable production of 'The Magic Flute' at Ilford Town Hall. She has children herself and believes that youngsters will enjoy, understand and empathise more with music if they are given the chance to attend age-appropriate performances and recitals with their families.

Helen belongs to a Friends association that supports the Havering Music School, and most Saturday mornings she takes her youngest daughter for lessons there. The Saturday School currently has about 320 pupils, and Havering Music Services teach music to about 3,500 children across the borough. In 2011 at least nine students from the music school went on to study music full time at universities and conservatoires.

Helen feels very strongly that more support should be available for children from all backgrounds who show an interest in learning to play an instrument: it goes a long way to enhancing their education across the curriculum and, more important, the love of music stays with them throughout their lives. She believes that music should be for everyone. One of the long-term ambitions of her Friends association is to bring classical ensembles to members of the community living in places such as hospices and care homes.

The opportunity to learn an instrument never arose for Helen as a child, but she took up piano lessons in her 40s. She no longer has lessons, but still tries to make time to play a little every day. Although Helen is happy to play in the privacy of her home, she would rather leave the public performances to the amazingly talented musicians she sees on the stage at Kings Place on Sunday nights.