

# The LCMS Magazine

## Welcome!

We hope that you were able to attend one of the two concerts which took place last season in the more intimate setting of Hall Two at Kings Place as part of our new venture, 'Up Close'. This year Hall Two is the venue for four concerts eminently suited to the space.

The 2018/19 season was opened there by Trio Goya, whose fine period instruments sounded lovely in the venue. In this issue, the Trio pianist, Maggie Cole, tells us about her discovery of the splendours of the fortepiano, including the beautiful one she now plays.

Another exploration of concert spaces is taking place this season. In November 2018 the LCMS and the Royal Over-Seas League welcomed the Chilingirian Quartet with Timothy Orpen to the ROSL's Princess Alexandra Hall, and on 17 February 2019 Raphael Wallfisch and John York will take the stage there. Of course, LCMS Friends' 25% discount applies in that venue as well. We welcome feedback on your experience at these new venues: [karolina@londonchambermusic.org.uk](mailto:karolina@londonchambermusic.org.uk)

The LCMS is keen to maintain and deepen its commitment to bringing classical music to children and young people. We have therefore extended our ticket scheme for younger audience members and now reserve 25 tickets each concert for students under 25 years of age, including school students (aged over seven), who can purchase tickets for only £5. These tickets can be pre-booked and there is no Box Office fee. The purchaser must produce a Student Card, except in the case of school students.

LONDON  
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SOCIETY

A central thematic strand at Kings Place through 2019 is the 'Venus Unwrapped' festival, a celebration of women's contribution to classical music, especially as composers. In his Behind the Notes article, Peter Fribbins, our Artistic Director, both explores LCMS' record of promoting women composers and highlights upcoming LCMS programmes that include them.

In April, for example, pianist Noriko Ogawa and the English Symphony Orchestra will showcase Czech composer Vítězslava Kaprálová. LCMS Director Pat Kremer writes in this issue about Kaprálová's 'formidable musical talent, tragically curtailed at the age of 25'. Noriko Ogawa is herself interviewed in Leon Levy's continuing series, 'Leon Levy Meets...'

We hope you enjoy these and the other articles in this issue. As always, we would be pleased to hear your reactions and suggestions for future articles.

**Jane Sufian**  
Editor



Red Priest



# Behind the Notes: LCMS & Venus Unwrapped 2019

A central thematic strand at Kings Place through 2019 is the Venus Unwrapped festival, a celebration of women's contribution to classical music, especially as composers. LCMS is

pleased to be hosting four of the events, beginning with Tamsin Waley-Cohen and Huw Watkins on 27 January in a programme of violin and piano pieces to include works by the 20th-century French composer Lili Boulanger and Anglo-American composer Rebecca Clarke and the earlier American composer, Amy Beach (born 1867).



Thea Musgrave

Whilst more could still be done, I am pleased with the LCMS record in relation to programming works by female composers over the years. When the LCMS concerts moved to Kings Place in 2008, our very first concert in Hall One presented an excellent Quartet for Oboe and Strings by Thea Musgrave, commissioned by LCMS and performed by Nicholas Daniel

and the Chilingirian Quartet. Of other contemporary works performed in LCMS concerts over the last decade, a good proportion have been by celebrated female composers of our time, including works by Roxanna Panufnik, Laura Kaminsky, Alissa Firsova, Sally Beamish, and Cecilia McDowall.

Programming good works by women composers from the 18th and 19th centuries has been more problematic since there is less music easily available. Women were essentially not permitted to compose music as a profession in European societies, for various complex social reasons – partly connected to the public-performance context of classical music (which set music production apart from writing novels or poetry) and partly because the publishing and performing of music often constituted a business activity. Not only did women need to be spared contact with such 'grimy' activities, but also it was not easy for them to have the necessary control of money or business affairs to enable such careers. It is too easy to forget how very different society was from ours, even 100 years ago. If 2018 was the centenary of (some) women gaining the vote in England, 2019 marks the centenary of the Act that finally enabled their entry into the professions, although in practice, barriers and stigma too often remained.



Dame Elizabeth Maconchy,  
by Howard Coster, © NPG

Maconchy's Quintet for Oboe and Strings from 1932. The reason we will not be featuring one

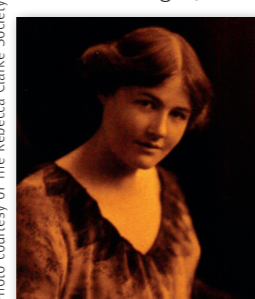
of her superb string quartets is that I encouraged the Albion Quartet to perform Maconchy's String Quartet No.4 in an LCMS concert as recently as 2017 – a memorable occasion. Whilst Maconchy was a student at the Royal College of Music in the 1920s, the Director Sir Hugh Allen apparently refused to allow her to be named as recipient of the prestigious Mendelssohn Scholarship, saying, "If we give you the scholarship you will only get married and never write another note." Her teacher, Vaughan Williams, was rather more supportive, writing in her graduation evaluation that he was "very sorry to lose her – but I can teach her no more – she will work for her own salvation and will go far."



Fanny Mendelssohn

Prejudice against women composers is long established. On 24 February, we present some wonderful arrangements (by Tom Randle) of lieder by Felix and his sister, Fanny Mendelssohn, performed by soprano Gillian Keith and the Consone Quartet. Some of Fanny Mendelssohn's songs were actually published in song cycles by Felix, so attribution can be quite

complicated. Felix was a frequent visitor to England, and visited Prince Albert and Queen Victoria several times. As Queen Victoria noted in her diary of 9 July 1842: "As he [Felix Mendelssohn] wished to hear me sing, we took him over to the large room, where, with some trepidation, I sang, accompanied by him, 1<sup>st</sup> a song which I thought was his composition, but which he said was his sister's, & then one of his beautiful ones, after which he played to us a little." As well as presenting some of Fanny Mendelssohn's songs in February, on 3 November the LCMS will host the celebrated Chiaroscuro Quartet in a concert to include her famous String Quartet in E flat.



Rebecca Clarke

Other notable pieces by women composers in LCMS concerts in 2019 include Rebecca Clarke's Rhapsody for Cello and Piano, in another of our concerts at the Royal Over-Seas League in Piccadilly on 17 February – this one to be given by Raphael Wallfisch and John York. Back at Kings Place, on 28 April we welcome the pianist Noriko Ogawa and the English Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Kenneth Woods, in a programme to include the exciting Partita for piano and strings by Czech composer Vítězslava Kaprálová. Kaprálová seems to be becoming something of a cult figure, her music championed by, amongst others, the conductor Rafael Kubelík. Born in 1915, she died in France in 1940 at the age of only 25, yet had already composed some astonishing music, including the Partita, completed in 1939.

The LCMS's fourth formal contribution to Venus Unwrapped comes on 6 October, with the violin and piano duo Mathilde Milwidsky and Sam Haywood, and a work that I discovered myself, one of the violin sonatas by the now almost forgotten Agnes Zimmermann. Born in Cologne

in 1847, Agnes Zimmermann came to London as a child, studied piano and composition at the Royal Academy of Music in the 1860s, performed with many famous musicians of the day, including in piano duets with Clara Schumann, and wrote some marvellous chamber music.

The LCMS' precursor organisation, the South Place Sunday Concerts, presented a fascinating event in April 1915, a concert of music exclusively by women composers, performed entirely by women musicians. Included in the programme was Zimmermann's Sonata No.1 for Piano and Violin in D minor, Op.16, in what appears to have been the most substantial concert item that evening.

After quite a bit of detective work, I managed to

track down some original publications of all three of Zimmermann's violin sonatas, buried in an uncatalogued box of papers in an academic library. With the generous support of the Ambache Charitable Trust and Middlesex University, I have facilitated a CD recording of these beautiful pieces, also to be made by Mathilde Milwidsky and Sam Haywood. We hope to be able to launch the new disc at the October concert, and so I hope, in a modest way, to have made my own contribution to extending and deepening the available repertoire of excellent historical music by women composers, much of it still hidden in the past.

**Professor Peter Fribbins**  
LCMS Artistic Director



## "Truly Grand": The Mozart String Quintets

**The Chilingirian Quartet, joined by violist Prunella Pacey, are performing Mozart's six string quintets with viola during the LCMS 2018/2019 seasons.\* Here, LCMS' Walter Rudeloff discusses the quintets with Levon Chilingirian.**

**Walter Rudeloff** Many musicians, chamber-music enthusiasts and musicologists rank the Mozart string quintets among the supreme achievements of Mozart's output. As a performing musician, where and why do you place these works?

**Levon Chilingirian** The viola quintets are indeed some of Mozart's supreme achievements! They remain the very highest benchmark for subsequent composers to try to emulate. The addition of the second viola frees up the first viola (Mozart's favourite instrument in his later years) to engage in memorable operatic duets with the first violin. Think of the great Mozart quintets as mini-operas in scale but truly grand in expression.

**WR** The string quartet as a medium is considered one of the crucial forms in chamber music, considering the many works composed for this grouping by Haydn, Beethoven and Mozart himself. How does the addition of the second viola affect the overall nature of a string quartet?

**LC** The addition of the second viola shifts the sound of the ensemble to a darker quality, yet manages to keep each voice distinct. The two main soloists have a matching partner whilst the cellist keeps the bass line but also leads memorably with the main theme of the first movement of the C major quintet.

**WR** When the Chilingirians are presented with a future quintet programme to perform, how do you go about

choosing the fifth member? Do you consider the pieces you are to perform or is it more of a personality matter?

**LC** We have been very fortunate in having outstanding second violists. It is a great advantage to have players from a similar musical background and aspirations in phrasing, sound and blending.

**WR** Do you have a favourite among the great quintets of Mozart? Why is it your chosen one?

**LC** I love all the great quintets equally. To choose, for example, the dark and brooding G minor, with the joyful ending in the major, you only have to be playing the sublime Adagio of the D major or the magnificent Andante of the C major or indeed the wonderful Trio of the E flat (a great favourite of Joachim's\*\*) to make any preference impossible!

**WR** What do you think of the quintets subsequent to Mozart's? Do any match (or perhaps surpass) Mozart's achievement?

**LC** Beethoven has a brilliant attempt... Mendelssohn most certainly achieved both musical greatness and textural brilliance and originality with his A major quintet, Op. 18. Brahms also presented two symphonies for quintet in his late quintets. Bruckner's addition has a magnificent central Adagio. None surpasses Mozart!

**Final words from Walter** At each concert listeners can judge for themselves as the Chilingirians perform a string quintet by one of these three (no Bruckner!) along with two Mozart quintets.

\* 13 May 2018; 3 February 2019; 19 May 2019

\*\* Joseph Joachim, Hungarian violinist, conductor, composer and teacher, is widely regarded as one of the most significant violinists of the 19th century.



**Keyboard players, whether they be performers on 'modern' piano or those who have chosen any of the many forms of early keyboard instruments as their means of musical expression, all share a common challenge.**

## On a Journey with Trio Goya

More often than not, we are playing repertoire on instruments that our composers would never have known. We rely on our knowledge of style, our technique and our musical imaginations to create a taste of the different eras, sound worlds and musical languages of these composers.

Most of us can remember playing and hearing piano recitals that opened perhaps with a taste of Scarlatti or Handel, moved on to a Classical sonata and then on to something from the Romantic period, finally ending up possibly with a work from the 20th century. Some of us will report that there was often a feeling that however committed we were to capturing the composer's intention, not all of the repertoire sat easily on this one version of a keyboard. The same could be said for a harpsichord recital, which might include music by Byrd, Couperin, Bach and Ligeti – all on a late-18th-century French harpsichord. A single instrument will usually be a necessity but it will struggle to convey all the stories that the composers want to tell.

I feel extremely fortunate to have stumbled into a room one day at the university I was attending and finding to my surprise, not a piano but a harpsichord. Approaching it with caution (I knew absolutely nothing about this instrument other than it plucked the strings), I sat for a long time playing huge amounts of Bach and Rameau and found even in that first session, a sense of music and instrument being 'right for each other'. Bit by bit, I entered the world of the many different forms of harpsichord and the many different types of music written for them. Later, the same sort of revelatory experience happened with a 1795 Viennese fortepiano. The music of Mozart, Haydn, CPE Bach, Beethoven, stretching forward to Schubert and beyond made more sense to me when played on the earlier version of this amazing invention that could create 'forte' and 'piano'.

## Vítězslava Kaprálová: Formidable Talent, Tragically Cut Short

**Our 2018/2019 season covers several commemorations, including the ending of WW1, works from the period during the world wars, and the music of Edward Elgar. It also focuses on women composers, who for so many years have been eclipsed by their male counterparts, which is also the focus of the Kings Place Venus Unwrapped series.**

One of our LCMS composers this season embraces at least two of these themes. I must admit to having been unaware

How does all of this relate to the music that I performed in October 2018 at Kings Place with my esteemed colleagues in Trio Goya – Kati Debretzeni and Sebastian Comberti – and to the recording we have recently made of Beethoven Opus 1 trios? Our starting point, as three musicians who have been exploring period instruments for many years, was the excitement and sense of discovery in learning what our earlier instruments could bring to the well-known Classical trio repertoire. The fortepiano with its light, responsive action, registers with very individual voices, the ability to create fine shadings of dynamics down to the softest whisper – all of these qualities mirrored in the string instruments, seems to help reveal what we see on the page. Very detailed phrasing given to us by the composers can be honoured and heard as intrinsic to the rhetoric of the music. Balance issues clear up (oh, what a joy, as the piano player, to be asked to play out rather than being constantly told we're too loud!).

Recording the Beethoven Opus 1 trios brought home to us ever more clearly just how much we cherish the experience of working on period instruments. The journey from the very Haydnesque Opus 1 No.1, which sits effortlessly and so happily on my 1795 fortepiano, through to No. 2 with its expansive slow movement, music that already is asking the delicately constructed piano to find new ways of speaking, and finally to No. 3, in which it feels like the piano is pushed to its very limits by Beethoven's radical ideas...this is a journey which we feel enlivened by and hope will speak to our listeners. In our LCMS concert on Oct 14th we made a journey through trios by Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. As ever, we were delighted to be conveying our joy in playing music on instruments they knew and were inspired by.

**Maggie Cole**

of the Czech composer and conductor Vítězslava Kaprálová, whose brief life one could imagine as a TV drama. She was pretty; in photos we see her beautifully made up, hair in a fashionable bob, and looking very 'trendy' in bow tie and black jacket. That appearance hid a formidable musical talent, tragically curtailed at the age of 25.

Kaprálová was born in 1915 in Brno, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Her earliest



Photo courtesy of The Kapralova Society

influences were her composer father, Václav Kaprál, himself a pupil of Leoš Janáček, and her singer/teacher mother, Viktorie Kaprálová. A friend, and another pupil of Janáček, was Ludvík Kundura, father of the novelist Milan Kundura. Ludvík would later appear as soloist in the 1935 performance of Kaprálová's piano concerto, which she conducted.

Despite these connections there seems to have been very little encouragement from her parents: her father felt that conducting/composing was no career for a girl. But she showed very early promise, composing from the age of nine, and went on to study in Prague. It was whilst she was there studying under Vítězslav Novák and Václav Talich that her talent was recognised and some early compositions, including 'April Preludes', were played publicly.

One of those enchanted by the spell of Kaprálová and excited by her great talent was Bohuslav Martinů, and in 1937 he persuaded her to study with him in Paris rather than in Vienna, her intended destination. Here she met Nadia Boulanger and Charles Munch.

Martinů had just completed his best-known, rather surreal opera 'Julietta', the story of a man who falls in love with a beautiful girl in a dream, goes searching for her and when he finds her, chooses to remain in the dream rather than return to reality. Martinů and Kaprálová shared a strong sense that 'Julietta' was closely associated with Kaprálová. The relationship deepened between Martinů and his pupil, both professionally and personally, and she composed some of her most successful pieces under his influence, including the Partita for piano and strings.

Earlier, in November 1937, her graduation composition at the Prague Conservatory was the 'Military Sinfonietta', which reflected the intense pre-war atmosphere at that time in Czechoslovakia. She was the conductor of the 100-piece Czech

Philharmonic in the presence of the President when it was played. A year later, to great acclaim, she conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra in Queen's Hall in London, one of the first women ever to do so, and was interviewed on an early BBC Arts programme.

Then, just as her career began to rise with such enormous promise, it all fell apart. She saw her homeland for the last time in 1939, after the Germans invaded the Sudetenland. She and Martinů discussed leaving Europe for the United States together, but then Martinů felt he could not leave his wife, Charlotte.

Left alone in Paris Kaprálová became close to Jiří Mucha, son of the renowned Art Nouveau painter Alphonse Mucha. They married in the spring of 1940; she spent the morning of her wedding day with Martinů. Tragically, only weeks after the marriage she fell seriously ill with military tuberculosis. She and Jiří moved to the south coast, but she died shortly after. Martinů and Charlotte visited her grave before fleeing to New York.

Posthumously, she was inducted into the Czech Academy of Arts and Science, one of only 10 women to have this honour.

Martinů wrote of her, "If you find someone with such a sharp sense of envisioning a work before it is written down. If you find someone who actually understands how the parts of a work relate to each other, whose primary interest is in the whole, then you know you have encountered a first-class artist."

You can hear her Partita for piano and strings on 28 April at our Czech-inspired concert, which also includes, fittingly, the Partita for strings by Martinů, as well as the romance of Dvořák's Serenade for strings, and a Mozart piano concerto. Definitely a concert to look forward to.

**Pat Kremer**

## Getting to Know You

**Introducing members of the LCMS/Kings Place Music Foundation community.**



**Aled Wyn Thomas**  
Visitor Services Manager –  
Front of House, KPMF

Aled grew up in Caernarfon, North Wales, before moving to Cardiff, where he studied Media & Performance at the University of Wales. During his formative years in Cardiff, he worked with many different theatre companies

as an actor, musician and writer. Aled has toured the UK, Ireland and the USA with various productions, including Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', 'An Inspector Calls' and an adaptation of Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein'.

Previous to his role at KPMF, Aled worked at the Wales Millennium Centre, the premier venue for the performing arts in Wales. Starting out as a Box Office Supervisor, he quickly progressed into the role of Team Leader, before eventually becoming the Customer Experience Manager, Front of House.

Prior to this, Aled worked as a Creative Learning Officer for Arts Council Wales, working predominantly in developing communities, with a focus on making the arts more accessible in deprived areas.

His main passions in life are theatre, film and music. He love all types of performance and while he's admittedly something of a novice when it comes to chamber music, he is a strong believer in the power of music and the emotional

resonance it has for the listener, regardless of genre.

His favorite musical artists of all time include Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra and Tom Jones (naturally).

Aled is hoping his new role at Kings Place will broaden his musical horizons even further and will hopefully turn him on to different styles of performance he wouldn't have necessarily gone out of his way to hear before. He is looking forward to his new London adventure and hopes Kings Place will be a big part of it.



**Kateřina Jelínková**  
Student Director, LCMS

Kateřina, who is 21 years old, is a new member of LCMS' Board of Directors. Originally from the Czech Republic, she is currently in the second year of study for a BA in Music Business and Arts Management at Middlesex University, London. She moved to

London because she was always passionate about classical music and dreamt of working in the music industry. And London, for her, seemed the best option, with countless music venues of all genres. Classical music has been an inseparable part of her life since she was a little girl, and her parents always took her with them to concerts. When she was 14, she fell in love with opera and that was the moment she decided to work in the music industry and try to encourage more young people to go to classical-music concerts. When she got the chance to do a placement with LCMS, she was happy to agree. She had been to some LCMS concerts before and absolutely loves the venue and programme.



## Leon Levy meets Noriko Ogawa

**Noriko Ogawa will perform with the English Symphony Orchestra on 28 April 2019 in an LCMS concert showcasing music by three celebrated Czech composers, Dvořák, Martinů and Vítězslava Kaprálová, as well as Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 13 in C.**

No travelling this time to the wilds of South London as I met Noriko on a grey autumnal morning at the Café Rouge in the courtyard of Euston Station, where she certainly brightened up the drab surroundings.

Noriko's career had a remarkable beginning, with her first public performance before an audience at the age of two, two years before her first formal piano lesson. She was born in Kawasaki, an industrial town near Tokyo, the daughter of a piano teacher and businessman. Her house was always filled with noise, either from the piano or from Noriko herself going through the 'terrible twos' period.

Although she already played the piano, she had no technique and formal lessons began when she was four. She made rapid progress, and started her general education at the local school. At the age of six she also attended a music school in Tokyo, where she particularly liked the Saturday afternoon sessions. These were devoted to a wide range of musical topics including singing, playing, music theory and history. She feels that this was an important part of her general music education, which stood her in good stead in her later career.

She moved to a specialist music school at the age of 15, but found progress difficult due to the illness of her teachers, and this run of bad luck continued when she moved to the

Juilliard in New York and her teacher died. By a stroke of good luck, she met the eminent pianist Benjamin Kaplan, who was visiting New York from London, and he awarded her a scholarship to study in London for a period of three months.

Such was the immediate success of this collaboration that Noriko described it as 'love at first sight'. As the period came to an end and she was down to her last £7, she came third in the Leeds Piano Competition, which led to wide acclaim, concert engagements and an agent, and her career took off.

At first she struggled with a narrow repertoire and performed on what she described as an 'ad hoc' basis; but with an increasing number of concert engagements and recording contracts, her range of composers grew rapidly. She is now based in London and travels frequently to Japan.

Her favourite composer is Debussy. She has recorded the complete Debussy series and her recording of his 'Images Books 1 and 2' was chosen as the top recommendation on BBC Radio's CD Review.

She is now a professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and is on the adjudicating panel of many important competitions in the UK, Japan and other countries. She was appointed chairperson of the prestigious 10th Hamamtsu International Piano Competition in Japan, which took place in November 2018. She acts as artistic adviser to the MUZA Kawasaki Symphony Hall in her home town. This concert hall, renowned for its excellent acoustics, was rebuilt after the earthquake of 2011 destroyed the original building. Kawasaki was previously known as a drab industrial town, but the concert hall has transformed its image and attracted leading performers from all over the world.

We then went on to discuss Noriko's personal preferences. She is an advocate of modern music, but it is important that both performer and audience keep an open mind and that some attempt to explain what is going on is made to the audience before the performance. Whatever the music, she feels that the job of the soloist is to play with emotion and not just in accordance with the musical score. She is a great fan of British audiences but finds Japanese audiences less forthcoming.

She dislikes snobbery in music. Soloists, orchestras and anyone else involved in performance must play as a team with everyone feeling equal. The conductor's role is important, not only in knowing the music, but also as a people and team manager.

Noriko is passionate about charity work. She raised substantial funds after the earthquake in Japan in 2011, and she founded Jamie's Concerts, a series of concerts for autistic children and their parents, and works closely with the National Autistic Society.

Noriko is a natural optimist despite the pessimism which seems to prevail in Japan. She has faith in her work and believes that in the end the majority of people will come through difficult situations – a very British attitude!



## The First Time

**Kateřina Jelínková (left), a new member of the LCMS Board of Directors, wondered what the reason was that so many young people don't listen to classical music. It's just not as entertaining as popular music? Or they lack knowledge of the genre? In an attempt to encourage more young people to go to classical-music events, she invited her friend Lily Ferreira, who had never attended a classical-music concert, to one of our LCMS concerts. Afterwards, she interviewed Lily about her reactions.**

**Kateřina Jelínková:** Was it your first time listening to classical-music?

**Lily Ferreira:** I have listened to it before on the radio or at someone else's house, but this was the first time that I went to a live event of classical-music.

**KJ** Why didn't you attend a classical-music concert before?

**LF** I am from Portugal, and back home in the small town I used to live in there wasn't really the opportunity to go to a classical-music concert. Apart from that, we don't have a tradition of listening to classical-music in my family.

**KJ** What were your thoughts when I invited you to go to the concert?

**LF** To be honest, I went because you're my friend, and I kind of thought it's going to be boring.

**KJ** Did the concert change your opinion?

**LF** Yes, it has changed my opinion completely. I understood that classical-music is something that I can include in certain moments of my life from now on.

**KJ** Can you tell me a little bit more about your experience?

**LF** First of all, I was surprised that classical-music has some rules, like behavior rules, such as there's only certain times to clap. Also, I realized that every single piece of music has a story behind it, and that's fascinating. The way that the players were into the music, it felt like there was just them and the instruments, no one else in the room.

**KJ** During the concert the Albion Quartet was playing string quartets composed

by Beethoven, Dvořák and Britten. Which composer caught your attention the most and why?

**LF** In the first piece by Beethoven I wasn't really into the concert so I didn't really pay much attention. After the first piece I decided to read the short description of each composer in the programme. I liked most the music of Dvořák. After reading the programme I was really into the music. I really did understand what he was feeling when he composed it.

**KJ** Did this experience change your opinion somehow?

**LF** Before I wasn't even considering going to classical-music. Now I am actually interested to see more concerts.

**KJ** What was your first impression of the venue?

**LF** It was different than I expected because it's a new building. It felt really welcoming with a nice staff.

**KJ** Are you considering attending another concert of LCMS in the future?

**LF** Yes, definitely, I would like to.

**KJ** Would you recommend this to some of your friends?

**LF** Yes. I can try to show my friends, who like me didn't even consider classical-music, that it's actually good and enjoyable.

**KJ** What is the way you get to know about concerts?

**LF** Usually on social media, such as Instagram or Facebook.

**KJ** How would you like to get information about upcoming LCMS concerts?

**LF** I think a good way would be to promote them on Instagram and social media of Middlesex University and other London-based social-media pages.



## Friends' Voices

**Thank you, LCMS!**

I was six and we were living in Surbiton in Surrey, when a letter came from my grandparents, who lived in County Durham (at that time phone calls seemed to be used only for emergencies), in which they said

that they were thinking of getting rid of the family piano, but wondered if I might be interested.

I doubt I was involved in the decision, but my grandmother's upright piano duly arrived, and I started lessons. It's beside me as I type – rather splendid, with curves and architectural columns and a wonderful marquetry spray of leaves and flowers. It tells me that it came from J & W Shepherd from Lewisham High Street. How it got from Lewisham to Bishop Auckland, where my grandparents always lived, I've often wondered. My new tuner reckons it's long past its 100th birthday. That would fit, as my grandparents had their first child, my mother, in 1912. At that time piano salesmen would set off with a few pianos travelling the country, and one of them made a sale.

In my grandparents' new married life the piano would have been one of their main sources of entertainment. Both my grandparents sang. When there was a family gathering there was always a sing-song, so the piano, before it came to me, would have had pride of place. I worked through the Grades, and when my children did the same, my daughter with the flute and my son with the clarinet, I accompanied them. The other week, my granddaughter, aged two, came to visit and just as I was about to play her some nursery rhymes, we realised she wasn't happy. But tears changed to smiles as we sat her on the piano stool and she 'played'.

But this is really meant to be about the LCMS, not my piano. About three years ago I moved to Bloomsbury after something of a personal crisis and discovered Kings Place

and the LCMS concerts. For many years, classical music had been below the stage (theatre, opera, ballet) and art in my cultural interests and rarely chamber music. Suddenly a new world opened up. Apart from this rich new repertoire for me, I was fascinated listening to it live and watching the interplay between the musicians. Then I discovered the wonderful concessions at the Wigmore Hall. I was hooked. I went to a study day at Kings Place about the Beethoven quartets and bought Edward Dusing's 'Beethoven for a Later Age: The Journey of a String Quartet',\* which told me both about playing the music and its history and more importantly the chemistry between the players.

And not just the classics. For a few years, my son and I would occasionally have a 'boys' night out' and hear the London Sinfonietta. I'm also a supporter (and barman) of the Riot Ensemble.\*\* So I love it when the LCMS programme includes something contemporary. After all, Beethoven was contemporary and revolutionary. Which is why his bust sits on stage with the London Sinfonietta.

But my concertgoing at Kings Place has had benefits beyond the music. Some months ago, I received an email inviting me to their 10th birthday celebration. I assumed they'd sent it to their mailing list. I accepted. It seemed to be free. What's not to like? I imagined it would be something of an 'open house'. There might be a warm glass of chardonnay and if something else came up that evening I might give it a miss. At the end of September, another email mentioned the line-up: The Sixteen, Thomas Gould (in contemporary mood), Sean Shibe, soul, jazz, brass – a wonderfully eclectic mix. I went. What a sight – Kings Place was decked over all in birthday-party splendour, trays of chilled champagne (definitely not a warm chardonnay in sight), Indian and Middle Eastern food, Thames oysters, puds galore, and both the champagne and the music kept coming.

It was a bit like a wedding in that you went up to people and asked what their connection was. They all seemed to be the great and good of the London and Kings Place music scene, including our dear LCMS Board of Directors, and I could

only explain that I hadn't a clue why I'd been invited. All was revealed, however, in the speech by Peter Millican, Kings Place Executive Chair, whose vision it was to build Kings Place. They'd picked 100 audience members to add to the party guest list. So my regular Sunday evenings at the LCMS – and a few others at Kings Place – had got me the invitation.

So thank you, LCMS, for the music I've enjoyed over the last three years, which has been a tremendous support for

me, and thank you indirectly, LCMS, for one of the best parties I've ever been to. And it only cost me this article!

**John Thirlwell**

\*Reviewed by Chris Bradshaw in Issue 12 of *Chamber Music Notes*, [www.londonchambermusic.org.uk](http://www.londonchambermusic.org.uk)

\*\* The Riot Ensemble is a new-music ensemble, connecting people to contemporary music in concerts and events that are “innovative, vibrant and rewarding....” [riotensemble.com](http://riotensemble.com)

Photo: Nick Rutter



## Of Voices Rich and Full: Sonoro

**Neil Ferris and Michael Higgins, the joint artistic directors of Sonoro, have planted their professional chamber choir so distinctively onto the music scene that it's difficult to remember that the choir's first performance was only in 2016.**

Neil and Michael first met in 2007, when Michael, a pianist and composer, was accompanying the Birmingham Bach Choir, where Neil was standing in as conductor for Paul Spicer while he was on sabbatical. Michael subsequently was appointed accompanist to Wimbledon Choral Society, whose conductor was Neil, and they have worked regularly on a number of projects since then.

Neil's early training was as a violinist, but he discovered a love of choral music later, at the chapel at Royal Holloway, University of London. With Sonoro he wanted to take advantage of the highly skilled singers at his disposal to explore a rich, warm sound, distinct from the traditional cathedral sound and that of, for example, an opera chorus (*'sonoro'* in Italian means 'sonorous, of voices rich and full'). As joint artistic directors, Michael and Neil have presented varied programmes that have made a big impact, including Martin's Mass for Double Choir, Rachmaninov's Vespers, Brahms' Requiem, and choral works for the Proms.

Michael, in correspondence with me, recalled the origins and development of Sonoro. "We started making plans for Sonoro in late 2014/early 2015, and our first rehearsal was in January 2016, prior to our debut concert at St Martin-in-the-Fields. We came up with a long list of names reflecting the type of sound we had in mind – warm, rich and varied, colourful, sonorous – and once we started using 'Sonoro' we knew it was right.

"Our singers all have varied careers as soloists, opera singers, teachers, conductors, and some sing with some of the other wonderful professional choirs, although others only sing in a choral context with Sonoro.

"In our first year we wanted to establish our reputation, so performed every few months, as well as being invited to sing in the Wimbledon International Music Festival and by LCMS at Kings Place. There were fewer concerts in year two, but we recorded our debut album, 'Passion and Polyphony', on the Resonus Classics label and established our outreach

programme with a performance of Handel's Messiah side-by-side with Wimbledon Community Chorus.

"Year three has been busy so far with the album launch, concerts in Switzerland and as part of the St. Magnus International Festival, Orkney, as well as outreach work including a choral-conducting masterclass, recording a Christmas album\* for release in late 2018, planning for a workshop and side-by-side performance of Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* in October, a schools music-and-art project, and early stages of our major new commissions and recording project for Spring 2019, 'Sonoro Choral Inspirations'.

"We have commissioned six new pieces inspired by well-known choral classics and our composers (Cheryl Frances-Hoad, Russell Hepplewhite, Joanna Marsh, James McCarthy, Will Todd and Janet Wheeler) have been asked to write at a suitable level for amateur chorus, without being simplistic. Each piece will be recorded by Sonoro and released online as YouTube videos, paired with the classic anthem, as well as performed in workshops and concerts in London, Birmingham and Cardiff in 2019.

"Neil and I work together to plan the repertoire, which always produces more interesting results as we are able to spark off each other – it's a very supportive, complementary and fruitful way of working.

"In putting together the selection of carols for our LCMS programme on 16 December 2018 at Kings Place we endeavoured to strike an even balance between some new compositions, some re-setting of familiar texts and new arrangements of familiar tunes, all topped off with a few festive favourites."

\*The latest Music Magazine has chosen this CD as their 5\* Christmas choice: "Christmas with Sonoro" /Sonoro cond. Neil Ferris, Resonus RES10226. Congratulations to Neil and Michael!

**Chris Bradshaw**