



# NEWSLETTER

FRIENDS OF THE CHELTENHAM MUSIC FESTIVAL

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## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

At our recent Annual General Meeting CMFS members very kindly supported my candidature for the vacant Chairman's position. In a 'previous life' I attended a meeting of Heads of Schools in the Midlands and must have dozed off in the back row. Whilst in dreamland I was proposed, seconded and voted in to become the next Chairman of the Education group! However I can truly state that I was wide awake on this occasion, and it is an honour and a privilege to serve as CMFS Chairman following the quiet, thoughtful, modest and outstanding stewardship of Graham Lockwood. He will be a hard act to follow.



Andrew with Camilla King

Perhaps as a way of introducing myself to members I have yet to meet it might be helpful to outline a bit of my history. My first employment was as Director of Music at the King's School, Gloucester....whilst playing Rugby at Kingsholm. Subsequent music posts took me to Brighton, then Shrewsbury, and then as Headmaster to the Downs School in Colwall, and Orwell Park in Suffolk before appointments as Headmaster of English schools in Almaty, Kazakhstan and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. I consider myself SO fortunate that in all my various posts I have been able to still make music in the community, and arrange concerts for young musicians.

It was through my wife Liz's volunteer work at the Gustav Holst Birthplace Museum that I was introduced to Graham Lockwood, who has been so helpful and encouraging as I have explored some collaborative initiatives between CMFS and Ian James of Chapel Arts. Ian is **very enthusiastic** about making Chapel Arts vibrant for both art **and** music, and starting in May hosted Friday lunchtime Free Concerts given by local schools, and also the Japanese pianist Asuka. Each event was attended by approximately 50 people. This autumn a series of further collaborative events have been arranged – more Friday Lunchtime Concerts, "Rush Hour" concerts of Fridays at 6pm, and some Sunday afternoon events beginning with a *Magical Acoustics* Lecture to be given by the wonderfully amusing and informative Professor Mike Gluyas and his wife Wendy on 23<sup>rd</sup> September. *For full details of these and other events please see our website at [www.cmfs.org.uk](http://www.cmfs.org.uk)*

There are many other initiatives for the CMFS committee to explore as we help to raise awareness and funds for the Cheltenham Music Festival. Meurig Bowen has led us to ten glorious years as Artistic Director and leaves a wonderful legacy. And now Alison Balsom will bring her energy, ideas, inspiration and outstanding musicianship to the Festival, and CMFS looks forward to supporting her in every way possible. These are exciting times. **Andrew Auster**

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### **GRAHAM LOCKWOOD: a tribute from the Chairman of the Festival**

For as long as I can remember Graham has found time in his busy life to give generously of his extensive talents to contribute to the cultural life of the town. He was an outstanding Chair of the Cheltenham Festivals through a period of considerable change, and was the author of a detailed yet entertaining history of the Music Festival. The Holst Birthplace Museum benefited enormously from Graham's skills and I recently had the good fortune to succeed him as President of the Cheltenham Arts Council. In July Graham retired as Chair of CMFS and, as we have come to expect, he leaves this valued charity in even better shape than when he succeeded Jim Harrison.

Graham is expert in judging when best to lead from the front, being hands-on to achieve an objective, and when best to rely on the skills of others and allow them to deliver a positive outcome. CMFS committee members have been privileged to work under Graham's chairmanship. His combination of light touch and clear strategic vision sets a standard for those who follow. In Andrew Auster, he has identified a very able successor, and he has taken the opportunity to retire when he felt it appropriate. Thank you, Graham. We owe you an immense debt of gratitude for everything you have done for Cheltenham. **Edward Gillespie**





## The 2018 Cheltenham Music Festival: Reactions and reflections

Once again CMFS members were invited to share some of their 2018 Music Festival experiences with Newsletter readers, and of course you did not disappoint! Here, much edited for space, is a sampling of the feedback...we even heard once more from our visiting Italian friend, Signora Antonella Dolce....

**J.Bristol;** *Bernstein's Candide* has always been a favourite of mine, so I was delighted to see the Festival put on this Ilford Arts & Opera della Luna production. It was outstanding – very pacy, and beautifully played and sung. The Pillar Room venue was perfect for the apparent spontaneity of a theatre in the round performance. A splendid evening.

**A.Teesdale;** *Maxim Vengerov* – a great treat. The first half on his own, with piano accompaniment, played marvellously. After the interval an Orchestra from Oxford came on and we all worried we wouldn't see him again, but he came back to join the orchestra for the second half. *Benjamin Grosvenor* – an amazing tour de force with not a sheet of music in sight, and at the end played for us not one but two brilliant encores – hugely brilliant and generous. *Steven Isserlis* together with an accomplished pianist made their final Cesar Franck piece truly out of this world!!!

**G.L.** The funding of new commissions is a key purpose for the CMFS. Many such commissions are rarely played after the first performance, so it was encouraging to see a critic finishing his review of our 2018 funded commission with the words "I hope it is played often." The composition referred to is *Kalon* by *Richard Blackford*, a composer who has had premieres at Cheltenham before, is a former Chairman of the Music Festival and was described by the Times reviewer as "one of the liveliest musical minds around." *Kalon* is an ancient Greek word meaning perfect physical and moral beauty. The work is unusual in that it is written for string orchestra surrounding a string quartet with the latter playing much of the time in a different tempo to the orchestra. Morrison, the Times critic, rated the performance by Martyn Brabbins and the National Orchestra of Wales as "emotionally sincere and intellectually intriguing." CMFS should be proud to have funded this one.

**PE** The BBC National Orchestra of Wales were on tip top form, particularly the strings for their Saturday afternoon concert in the Town Hall. Was it the decision to put the players on the floor rather than the platform that improved the acoustic? They were rich and ripe in the Elgar Introduction & Allegro and, with the estimable Brabbins in charge, gave a fine account of *Richard Blackford's Kalon* - bravo CMFS for supporting this. Schumann and Brahms in the Pump Room with the *Eberle Sachse Viersen Helmchen Quartet* (not a name that trips off the tongue!) was rewarding even if it might have been better to start with the Schumann not the Brahms piano quartet. But they played as if their lives depended on it, though in the Schumann the piano was a tad overbearing. But the sun shone on and on, the football faded from one's consciousness and it was a joy to be with old friends. One caveat; that endlessly repeated message before almost every concert about the Cheltenham Festivals being a charity that reaches out to young people. Where were these thousands of young people? And what has become of Cheltenham Festivals principle charitable purpose, namely to stage cultural events? **Editors note:** *this repetition of the message that the Festival is primarily a youth focussed charity seems to have rather puzzled (annoyed?) several of my correspondents, who said they had thought it was about the music.*

**A.** The *Kolobov* opera was magnificent, as was the *Berlioz Grande Mass*...I hope I do not face a day of wrath as depicted in the *Dies Irae*! It was a pity there was not a larger audience for the excellent *Chineke* chamber orchestra.

**V.F.** The Cheltenham Music Festival very often happens in a spell of warm weather but I think this year is the hottest for the past 35 years, probably exceeding the year when the very formal Alfred Brendel actually removed his jacket. A comparable moment this year happened in the *Chineke* recital in the Pump Room when a kind member of the audience lent a large spotted handkerchief to the double bassist who was struggling to find something to mop her face between movements in the Schubert Octet.

**J.B.** A huge rich sound emanated from the Town Hall stage as the *Kolobov Novaya Opera Theatre* of Moscow simulated a performance in one of their great opera venues. I was held in thrall with the performance and was seen to jig a little in the interval after an exciting rendition of the Polovtsian dances....Matching this thrilling experience seemed impossible until we experienced the energetic, vigorous and colourful playing of the *Chineke Ensemble*, whose accomplished and skilled performances belied their youthful appearance. The talk on Samuel Coleridge-Taylor by *Anna Barry* from the RCM was exceptionally interesting. Having sung his *Hiawatha* at the age of 18 I found it fascinating to learn about the composer's background – like Mozart he sadly died in his mid thirties.

**Antonella Dolce** I have been again to your little town and I was happy that for a change the sun she is shining like in my beautiful Italy. And your ladies have got better dressed in the sun. I saw lovely music playing with strings in the Pump Room with the big jug of flowers and two small operas. But where is Verdi? Where is Puccini? I think English do not love opera like in my country. But I go home happy with a big lot of different music. I will return next year.

## From the Chairman of the Festival, Edward Gillespie . Reactions – and some thoughts about the future.

This year's Festival was billed as a journey from Meurig Bowen to Alison Balsom and, to give us an even greater sense of development we were visited by their predecessors Michael Berkeley and Martyn Brabbins. From *Mahan Esfahani's* first note at Syde to the final chord of *Juliana* the sun shone and there was a feel-good atmosphere that reflected the top quality audience experience. This can only be achieved through precision of back stage organisation and the welcoming tone of our brilliant volunteers. Immediate reaction suggests this was a Festival much enjoyed, demonstrating its distinctive quality in the town's busy classical music landscape. Directors of Festivals Ian George, Alison, Festival Manager Camilla King, myself and the team came to the Festival with the outline of a plan for 2019 and the 75<sup>th</sup> Festival in the forefront of our minds. We will now be assessing whether we need to make any adjustments before completing the programming and scheduling for next July.

We gave a clue to one intention. It's on page 2 of the brochure, yet no-one commented on this, the dates for 2019, 5<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> July. The Music Festival is very fortunate to be part of the Cheltenham Festivals charity and as we move forward, 'Music' needs to be making more impact and being less reliant on its siblings, Jazz, Science and Literature. Revenue this year from sponsors, partners and ticket sales was some distance below expectations. Celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> year gives us a springboard to attract more sponsorship, appeal to regular customers for greater support and to encourage more people to buy more tickets. The appointment of Alison brings in an Artistic Director with a massive, wide appeal and we look forward to presenting plans which will excite and intrigue.

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*Many CMFS members will have had the opportunity to meet our new Artistic Director during the Festival – in addition to her many other talents she seems to have mastered the art of being several places at once, welcoming audiences and musicians at venues across town. And while she has given a few interviews to the press, we thought CMFS members, would like to 'hear' her thoughts directly.....*

Alison with Meurig & Michael Berkeley

It is a real pleasure to be able to share a few thoughts about the upcoming season of the Music Festival. After an incredible array of world class concerts, new works, wonderful projects and ambitious events in the 2018 Festival you can imagine it feels the challenge is huge to be able to match Meurig's wonderful curation. However, as many of you know, despite the

incredible quality of much of what CMF puts on, it is getting progressively harder in these times to increase numbers, attract new audiences, and welcome the wider world to any classical music festival. Cheltenham Music Festival celebrates its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019, and my aim is not only to introduce more of the world's greatest artists not only to our loyal audiences, but also to the huge number of people who might already come to Cheltenham Festivals but don't yet know much about CMF and are perhaps a little nervous to take the leap.

This fantastic and universal music is for everyone, and I see it as a duty to de-mystify the idea of going to a classical music concert, whilst never in any way compromising the quality once an audience steps through the door. We will put the concerts together and present them in ways that make people feel even more welcome, and thus hopefully more willing to take a risk and explore music and artists that they may be unfamiliar with. I'm hoping, for example, that at the start of almost every event we can open with a brand new work, even though many of these pieces will be no more than two or three minutes long. We've also confirmed some incredibly exciting world premieres from several of today's leading composers – so Cheltenham's legacy as an international leader in important new music lives on. On top of all this, many young people in Gloucestershire and beyond will hugely benefit from some wonderful outreach plans...and the community opera is going to be a spectacle to behold!

I am also keen to increase the sense of a central focus to the Festival, and to that end we will be making Imperial Gardens and the area around the Town Hall very much the focal point over the first weekend. We are also hoping to have a central hub in the form of a marquee next to the Town Hall where one can buy tickets, have a drink with friends, and chat to the volunteers about what's on where. It will also, I hope, make the Festival a little more visible. Beyond that, we will pull out all the stops at the Pump Room during the week, and make the space work even harder for us, so as many people as possible feel it's worth staying around after the concerts, whether it's for a lovely lunch, or another short afternoon concert, an interesting post concert event, or simply a picnic with friends.

The final weekend we are inviting all sorts of artists who will take your breath away and add some unusual colours to the CMF palette. The well known cliché exists for a reason – something for everyone! I very much look forward to spending more time with many of you over the coming months, and especially during next year's Festival. A huge thank you once again for your generosity, and for recognising the importance of supporting the arts in these fast moving and changing times. Onwards! **Alison Balsom**



## UPCOMING EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY



### Cheltenham Music Festival Society Events:

#### **Sunday September 23<sup>rd</sup> The Magical World of Acoustics. Professor Mike and Wendy Gluyas. Chapel Arts at 3 p.m.**

An interesting audio-visual “extravaganza” that explores the many aspects of sound and hearing. The lecture by Professor Mike Gluyas and his wife Wendy is packed with demonstrations, sound effects, “live” experiments and colour illustrations. Topics covered include the effects of sound on people, sound production, musical instruments and how they work, acoustical illusions – and many other topics. *This is a musical event arranged by Chapel Arts in collaboration with CMFS.* **Tickets £5** obtainable from Chapel Arts, Knapp Rd, Cheltenham, GL50 3QQ.

#### **Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> October; Harp and Voice Recital. Chapel Arts at 3p.m.**

A recital by counter tenor Patrick Craig, who sings with the St Paul’s Cathedral choir and the Tallis Scholars, performing with Frances Kelly on the Baroque Harp. A CMFS event at Chapel Arts.

**Tickets; £15** obtainable from Chapel Arts. Prosecco, canapés etc after the concert.

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**NB;** Over the coming months there will be a series of concerts held at Chapel Arts, Knapp Road, Cheltenham, GL50 3QQ. Our new Chairman, Andrew Auster, is very keen to encourage and support activities by and for young people, both as performers, and as members of the audience for classical music. To that end he has worked with Ian James of Chapel Arts to put together a program of interesting events. The first is shown below. A full listing can be found on our website:

[www.cmfsoc.org.uk](http://www.cmfsoc.org.uk)

#### **Friday September 7<sup>th</sup> 2018 Louis Morford. Violin Recital, Chapel Arts at 6 p.m.**

Louis has been a pupil at Dean Close School and goes to Merton College Oxford this autumn to read music. He began playing the violin at the age of six, and has been taught by Matthew Denton of the Carducci Quartet since 2011. He is also a former chorister with Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum, with whom he has toured across Europe and the USA. He joined the CBSO Youth Orchestra in 2012, performing with them under the baton of Edward Gardner, Andrew Litton and Mirga Grazinyte-Tyla.

**Tickets : £5.00** obtainable from Chapel Arts. [www.thechapelarts.com/exhibitions-events.com](http://www.thechapelarts.com/exhibitions-events.com)

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**Cheltenham Opera Society:** For information and availability please contact Robert Padgett, 14 Century Court, Montpellier Grove Cheltenham, GL50 2XR. Tel; 01242 571 802

**Saturday September 28<sup>th</sup> at 3p.m.** “War and Peace” ( Prokofiev). Welsh National Opera, Cardiff.

**Thursday November 15<sup>th</sup> at 7.15 p.m.** “La Cenerentola (Rossini). Welsh National Opera, Birmingham

#### **Gustav Holst Birthplace Trust:**

**Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> September at 7.30pm. St Andrew’s Church Montpellier.** Holst Birthday Concert, featuring the Cheltenham Choral Society, conducted by Ian Higginson, with Tenor James Gilchrist, Accompanist Alison Howell and Pianist John Wright. Tickets: £15 (members) £17 (non members) & £6 (students) to include a glass of wine/soft drink.

Tickets obtainable from The Wilson, The Holst Birthplace Museum or the website: [www.holstmuseum.org](http://www.holstmuseum.org)

**Friday 19<sup>th</sup> October at 7.30 p.m. St Luke’s Church Hall** “Holst as an Opera Composer” a talk by Nigel Simeone.

**Friday 30<sup>th</sup> November at 7.30 p.m. Christ Church Harwood Hall.** “The Stained Glass of William Morris & Edward Burne Jones.” A talk by Adrian Barlow

#### **Cheltenham Music Festival Society Committee**

**(Charity No 281044)**

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