



NEWSLETTER

FRIENDS OF THE CHELTENHAM MUSIC FESTIVAL
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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

The 2019 Music Festival has been full of innovation and an array of wonderful events. Thank you and congratulations to Alison Balsom, Camilla King, Edward Gillespie and the whole Festival team for such a splendid programme of concerts and events. May we as CMFS Friends also formally congratulate Edward on becoming the Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire.

CMFS are significant supporters of the Festival and this year our contribution to the Big Give Christmas appeal, together with Roger Jones' immensely generous legacy, supported the Nash Ensemble Concert and the Academy of Ancient Music with Nicola Benedetti, as well as some of the cost of printing the Festival Programme. CMFS membership has increased slightly during the year, but if anyone has any thoughts about how we can attract new members I would be pleased to receive your suggestions. One CMFS friend has suggested that the Membership subscription, which has not changed for several years, might be reviewed for next year and this is something the Committee will consider. Graham Lockwood in his Chairman's address a year ago expressed gratitude to Friends who opt for Benefactor status and it would be so much appreciated if others would consider increasing their level of membership to that of Benefactor. Graham was especially remembered at this Festival with a lovely tribute in the Programme book, and after the Nash Ensemble Concert Friends raised a glass in his honour at the Pump Room. When Graham died in December, Cheltenham lost its single most influential and generous supporter of music. Tributes from both Edward Gillespie and Meurig Bowen were published in our last newsletter, and are still on the website should anyone wish to revisit them.

During this last year there have been some outstanding concerts at the wonderful Chapel Arts venue, arranged in collaboration with CMFS but for which we bear no financial liability. There have been the free Friday lunchtime concerts featuring some extraordinarily talented pupils from local state and independent schools, including Gloucestershire Young Musician winners from the last three years. Lydia Kenny (saxophone) and Bill Ko (violin) this year's winner of the Gloucestershire Young Musician contest performed both at the Festival and at Chapel Arts. The Friday, Saturday night and Sunday afternoon concerts also featured outstanding young musicians, including Adam Heron from Cheltenham, a finalist at this year's BBC Young Musician contest, Vitaly Pisarenko from Russia who won the Liszt Piano prize and came 3rd in the last Leeds piano competition and many others. These events will continue in the autumn with eight Friday Lunchtime concerts, seven Friday six o'clock concerts and two Sunday afternoon concerts before Christmas. Please check the Chapel Arts website for details.

I am very grateful to Aidan Rose for his suggestion (made at the 2018 AGM lunch!) of a CMFS group trip to the Opera at the Everyman theatre, Aidan kindly made the arrangements and in April a group enjoyed an excellent performance of Verdi's Macbeth by the English Touring Opera Company.

CMFS cannot function without our Committee Members, and I am grateful for the valuable contributions of Norman Fyfe, Alan Haylock, Steve Hudson, Nicola Lawson, Hugh Barton, and Frances Gabriel our Newsletter Editor. Special thanks are due to Jennifer Stapleton, who has worked tirelessly as Honorary Treasurer and Membership Secretary since 2013, and has gallantly agreed to continue in that post for another year. Thanks also to Phil Stapleton, who continues as ex officio website manager. Two members of our committee stood down at this year's AGM: Dr Anne Dunn has served a total of nine years across three terms, 2007 – 2010, 2012 – 2015, and 2016 – 2019, and thanks are due for her significant contribution to the Society. Lastly, our Honorary Secretary, Mary Mackenzie, is being "released" after 10 years of dedicated service in this important role, and even before that Mary had been a Committee Member for various periods. Over these last twelve months on numerous occasions I have sought and been grateful to receive Mary's wise counsel. No-one attending a CMFS event over the 'Mary years' can ever forget the wonderful teas she and her team of helpers provided on so many occasions! Mary – thank you for your sterling service and dedication to CMFS. I am pleased to note that Rachel Tedd stood for election at the AGM and has been duly appointed as the new Honorary Secretary.

To all CMFS Friends – thank you for your support.

Andrew Auster

From the Chairman of the Music Festival

It is a rare occasion in a concert hall, theatre or other venue when the audience simply has no idea what is going to happen next, in the next five minutes, let alone in the second half. Such was the atmosphere in the Town Hall on the final Saturday of the Music Festival. “Wynton Marsalis in Concert” opened with Brass for Africa arriving with style and attitude from the back of the hall; by the time they reached the stage and joined their new friends in the Gloucestershire Youth Brass Band the tone for the evening had been set. We shared in their combined energy and heard harrowing stories of musicians who had survived the horrors of civil war including mental and physical disfigurement, and who now taught music and life skills across 26 outreach centres. Just to make us feel even more humble the trumpet backline included Wynton Marsalis, Guy Barker and Alison Balsom. Such is the power of music to engage people across continents and generations. Within a few hours the same stage had twice hosted local people of all ages, from 26 communities across Cheltenham who had grown together as a family over four years to devise, write, rehearse and perform “Across the Sky; A Community Opera.” This was exactly how we hoped the 2019 Festival would look, sound and feel – a Festival both for international stars *and* local heroes.

Several months before the Festival got under way I knew this would be Alison’s one and only. She had sought us out in order to step back a little from her life of travel and performance but, after little more than a year, as her baby daughter found her feet, Alison’s appetite for performing returned. Our loss is world audiences’ gain, as we heard for ourselves when Alison played the world premiere of Thea Musgrave’s Trumpet Concerto on the opening Saturday with the CBSO. Her appearance in Mixtape was veritably angelic. The kick I get out of being Music Festival Chair is working with the likes of Meurig and Alison, both class acts, both immensely talented and challenging. The Festival is travelling fast and I look forward to the next exciting episode and to meeting Jules Buckley who will be joining us for 2020 as Guest Curator. I am already a great admirer from his impact on the Late Night Proms. He is Musical Director of the UK’s Heritage Orchestra and Chief Conductor of Holland’s renowned Metropole Orkest. Jules will work alongside Camilla King, who has already programmed many of the main events.

The biggest disappointment of this Festival was failing to get closer to a capacity audience in the opening weekend for outstanding programmes by two of our finest orchestras. Was this a function of price, of unfamiliar conductors, who knows....In contrast, the final weekend, which has been much more of a problem in recent years, delivered two full houses, the first for the Academy of Ancient Music with the brilliant Nicola Benedetti, and the most delightful Richard Egarr. I loved the use of the Town Hall for other daytime concerts and an unexpected early highlight proved to be “Spanish Rhapsody” – exquisite music and dancing with an astounding number of costume changes. Absolute Music; Shostakovitch grabbed and held the audience, with the Kaleidoscope Chamber Orchestra pitch perfect, and afforded me an opportunity to swap Arvo Part stories with Simon Russell Beale. The Abbey gave me a magic moment when Jess Gillam engaged with the Brass for Africa guys; what the acoustic did with the Brandenburg Concert for those of us at the back is another story. Mixtape was a triumph of programming by Camilla King, but we must not kid ourselves the pricing policy is attracting local residents from Priors Park. The College Chapel and St Gregory’s church both gave audiences wonderful experiences, but I sadly missed the remarkable Christian Li, apparently one of the Rush Hour, if not Festival highlights. Though low on numbers Composium was high on quality and laid the foundation of what could become a valuable call-out for the future. And so to the Pump Room, and a series of concerts from Nash to Heath that gave all great delight. None more so than a discovery for me this year, the Ora singers with their programme of Madrigals ancient and modern. Music Clandestina’s recital featured another discovery for me, the music of Barbara Strozzi, one of many female composers whose work, long suppressed, is now being much more appreciated. That’s what is so special about the Festival, the mixture of the much loved and the new, in the same way many of us at Syde found that hearing Different Trains and a Philip Glass quartet is not so scary if you’re holding hands with your trusted Carducci friends!



Thank you to everyone for making the ten days such fun. We have lovely audiences and fabulous venues. We raised a glass to Graham and other absent friends; it will be ever thus.

Edward Gillespie

(Editor’s note: I had to twist his arm to get this photograph, but I thought CMFS Friends would like to see Edward in his full regalia!)

Some further (and much edited) reflections on the Festival:

I attended several events over the weekend, all of high artistic standards including the CBSO and the Shostakovitch event, so many thanks for that. However there were some logistical issues namely; having to queue outside the Town Hall before the talks on both Saturday and Sunday; there are a lot of frail and elderly people in the audience so this is not acceptable; very limited refreshments in the Town Hall and unhelpful responses from staff when I queried this; scheduling of a New generation event and the Shostakovitch made it difficult to attend both. **I.McD.**

Sounding North was my favourite concert of the Festival – such different music, by turns moving, thought provoking and surprising, and so beautifully sung by the Carice Singers. Some of it was extremely technically demanding and they absolutely nailed it. **R.T.**

New days, new ways and change is always unsettling **but** the music from the Free Stage could be heard during the Walton Suite in the Town Hall – perhaps Cox’s Meadow would be a better site? Grumble over, this year’s music has been such high quality it is hard to choose a highlight. **A. & N.**

Schumann Square, a “safari” chamber concert in several private houses, was a new venture this year and an absolute delight. I loved violinist Elena Urioste announcing that she would be playing several short pieces “by the great Schumann, and one by her husband Robert who was also a composer.” Cue warm laughter and applause. **Anon**

A chat with Camilla King



CMFS friends attending concerts and events at the 2019 Festival will have bumped into Camilla at nearly every one – doing everything up to and including rearranging the chairs at the Shostakovich event! I interviewed her for a Newsletter last year and, as we made the transition between Musical Directors, I was interested to learn how things have changed. She kindly made time for me in her busy schedule, and what follows is extracted from a recorded interview.

Camilla’s official title is now Head of Programming for the Music Festival, which brings us into line with the other three Cheltenham Festivals, who each have a Head of Programming working with Guest Curators on particular events. In the case of the Music Festival this means that Camilla is doing the bulk of the programming, and will work with Jules Buckley, our new Guest Curator, on some events for the 2020 programme. I thought CMFS Friends might be curious to learn a little more about Mr Buckley’s background and interests so Camilla explained that while he has a Classical Music background and is widely respected across the musical community he is best known as a composer and conductor in Jazz circles. With a friend, he started the Heritage Orchestra, since 2008 he has been the principal guest conductor with the Metropole Orkest in Holland, and from 2020 he will be Creative Artist-in-Residence with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. For a few years now he has been doing some programming at the Proms, both in the main programme and for some of their Late Night events and for the last 5 or so years had had several events in the Proms. Camilla has already met with him and they are discussing artists and projects on which they can work together.

Ticket sales in 2019 were a little under what had been hoped for, but we do typically see lower sales in a year when the Three Choirs Festival is at Gloucester, with people perhaps feeling they cannot get to everything or buy every ticket they would like. Like all arts organisations, even as a charity our Festival cannot rely on ticket sales alone to cover all costs and the Festival Team work hard to generate more funds, but balancing income and expenditure for events is an ongoing challenge. At this point Camilla has much of the 2020 programme mapped out, always in the knowledge that some changes of plan are inevitable. While she cannot reveal any of the specific programmes (I did ask! Ed.) she was able to share some of the performers we can look forward to – we have the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra coming, the Philharmonia, the Kanneh-Mason Trio, Milos the guitarist is coming back, as well as the Albion String Quartet, and some fantastic pianists including Eric Lu (winner of the Leeds Piano Competition), Alice Sara Ott, and Ingrid Fliter who plans a Chopin programme. Camilla hopes to do something similar to the very popular Schumann Square event which, if it goes ahead, will be on the final weekend to avoid any clash with the Free Stage. As always there will be a daily Pump Room concert, and in the Town Hall we’ll have the big orchestras playing wonderful repertoire. There will be an “early on sale” for the 2020 Festival.

Mentioning the Free Stage in Imperial Gardens led into a discussion about the importance of audience development, and the need to work hard on that while continuing with the high quality of Classical Music for which our Festival is renowned. The aim is to reach out to the audience of the future in a way that they feel comfortable with. Camilla says even friends in her own age group have admitted feeling uncomfortable just stepping inside a concert hall. The Festival team are doing a huge amount of work in schools, building relationships with children and their families, as well as events for slightly older groups, like Mixtape and the Free Stage, but she still finds that people in the town who are not already Classical Music fans are barely aware the Festival exists. What Camilla would love to achieve over the next few years would be for the Music Festival to really feel part of Cheltenham. Clearly quality remains central - Camilla said there was nothing on the Free Stage that she would not have felt comfortable to put on the main stage in the Town Hall and charge a ticket price for. This summer’s performers included Folk Musicians who have featured on Radio 3, and Ayanna Witter Johnson who has worked with the LSO. This was the first year for the Free Stage so there are things to be learned, such as the way sound can bleed into the Town Hall. However this is a Victorian building and even the sound of the hand dryers in the bathrooms can be audible in the hall, not to mention car horns etc.. The goal is to build trust with these new audiences and encourage them to come to events in the main programme.



Upcoming Events for Your Diary



Cheltenham Music Festival Society Events:

Free Fridays at Chapel Arts: A series of FREE concerts on Fridays, with no need to book. Concerts begin at 1 p.m. and last approximately 40 minutes. Young Musicians from local schools demonstrate their talents. The Secret Kitchen will be open serving drinks, cakes and light lunches.

Friday 4th October 2019; The Chapel Arts at 5 p.m. Kylie Tsang in recital.

Kylie is a prize winning Music Scholar at Cheltenham Ladies College and will play Mendelssohn, Chopin and Ibert on piano, as well as several pieces for flute.

Tickets £7 in advance; £9 on the door; £6 for students. Obtainable from Chapel Arts

Friday 11th October 2019; The Chapel Arts at 6 p.m. Aaron Le Maistre in recital:

Aaron is a 17 year old prize winning multi-instrumentalist and leader of the Gloucestershire Youth Orchestra. His programme includes Brahms, Glazunov, Ginastera and Liszt.

Tickets: £9 on the door; £ 7 in advance; £6 students. Obtainable from Chapel Arts

Thursday 17th October 2019; The Chapel Arts at 7.30 p.m. The Classics: Music and the Word.

Robin Smith on piano, Bryn Thomas on guitar, and a collection of fine musicians and singers play music with great lyrics and poems with great music and encourage you to think about the connection.

Tickets: £10 in advance; £12 on the door; £9 for students. Obtainable from Chapel Arts

For information on later events please see the website: www.thechapelarts.com

Gustav Holst Birthplace Trust:

Saturday 5th October 2019 at 7.30pm. St Andrew's Church Montpellier. The Holst Birthday Concert, featuring the Cheltenham Chamber Orchestra conducted by Timothy Carey. The programme includes Holst's Fugal Concerto, Songs without words No 1 and Lyric Movement, as well as music by Mozart and Vaughan Williams.

Tickets £16, all seats unreserved. Children free. Tickets available from the Playhouse, the Wilson, and the Holst Birthplace Museum, or online at www.holstmuseum.org.uk

13th November 2019 at 7 p.m. (arrive 6.45) in St Luke's Church Hall. Quiz Night with Fish and Chips.

Only 50 tickets on sale. Maximum team size four but can join a team on arrival.

Tickets: £12. Prebooking essential. Tickets available from the Holst Birthplace Museum or online at www.holstmuseum.org.uk or <http://www.eventbrite.co.uk>

Cheltenham Opera Society:

There will be trips to Birmingham on Wednesday 6 November 2019 to see Rigoletto (Verdi) (WNO) and to Cardiff on Saturday 8 February 2020 to see Les Vespres Siciliennes (Verdi) (WNO). We expected to book for Bluebeard's Castle (Bartok) with Bryn Terfel in a double bill with Stravinsky's The Nightingale in Cardiff in the summer of 2020 but the WNO did not allow any group bookings for that.

The Cheltenham Opera Society will be showing DVDs of Wagner's Ring during the autumn of 2019 and the spring of 2020, as follows: Das Rheingold at 3.00 pm on Sunday 13 October, Die Walkure at 2.00 pm on Sunday 27 October, Siegfried at 2.00 pm on Sunday 1 March and Gotterdammerung at 2.00 pm on Sunday 22 March, all at St Andrew's Church, Montpellier Street. CMFS members are welcome on payment of an entry fee of £5.

To get on the mailing list for opera trips, send your address, phone number and e-mail address to Robert Padgett, 14 Century Court, Montpellier Grove, Cheltenham GL50 2XR, 01242 571802, robertpadgett@btinternet.com.

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