

New Board Member

We're delighted to welcome one new trustee.

Michael Earl is currently interim Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Development and External Affairs) for University of Oxford, having previously been Dean of Templeton College. He has an extensive background in Business Studies, with a particular focus on Information Management and IT and how these relate to business strategy, and has published widely on these themes. Before returning to Oxford he held senior positions at the London Business School, was a fellow at Templeton College and on the faculty at Manchester Business School. He has chaired OP's Finance and General Purposes Committee for several years and he and his wife Alison regularly attend concerts.

Good Viola Vibes

The next Friends Evening takes place on Friday 23 January 2009 at the Haldane Room, Wolfson College. The evening will follow the usual format of drinks on arrival at 7pm, a musical interlude at 7.45pm, and a two course dinner with wine and coffee at 8.45pm.

On this occasion the musical entertainment will be provided by the Orchestra's distinguished Principal Viola, Stephen Shakeshaft, accompanied by pianist Tim Carey. Stephen's programme remains a closely guarded secret, but a leak from a highly placed and invariably reliable source has fuelled astonishing rumours of an original jazz piece for viola, piano and spell-bound audience!

Tickets at £30 are available on 020 8450 1060. Our Development Executive Vanessa Davis will be pleased to provide further information about this forthcoming event and the activities of the Friends in general.

Date for your diary: Friday 8th May 2009

Our second Friends' Evening in 2009 will take place on Friday 8th May at the Haldane Room, Wolfson College.

PLAYER PROFILE

Spike Wilson Cello



Spike Wilson was born and brought up in Hampshire, going to school in Bournemouth and gaining his first serious cello playing experience as a member of the Hampshire Youth Orchestra. Rather than pursue the traditional route to a playing career via one of the music colleges, Spike came to Oxford to read music at Queen's College, where his academic studies were consistently leavened by a healthy diet of performance, particularly of chamber music. It was in a student string quartet that he was to meet his future wife, Kate Bailey, now a familiar figure amongst the Philomusica violins.

Like many other post graduates, Spike remained susceptible to Oxford's notoriously powerful gravitational field and happily set about developing a local career as an orchestral and chamber musician – notably with the highly successful Holywell Ensemble which he created with Kate in 1983 – while fulfilling a number of teaching engagements at some of Oxford's most prestigious schools. Amongst these was Magdalen College School, where, at a string workshop, a chance encounter with Marios Papadopoulos led to his joining the Oxford Philomusica in 2000.

A sometime student of such luminaries as William Pleeth, Alexander Baillie and Christopher Bunting, Spike has always been keen to take his cello playing talent out of the concert hall and into the community. He is an active participant in the Philomusica's outreach programme, deriving particular satisfaction from the Orchestra's work with the young and the disadvantaged of all ages.

When not meeting his busy professional schedule Spike enjoys a little domestic chamber music – an 'in-house' string quartet being completed by daughters Rosie and Camilla – but for a real break turns to cliff-top walking in Cornwall.

Keynotes

The Newsletter of

Oxford Philomusica

Oxford's Professional Symphony Orchestra
in Residence at the University of Oxford

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January 2009, Issue 10

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A Spring in our Step

With the sound of the pre-Christmas Hallelujah Chorus still ringing in our ears, the Philomusica's Spring programme hits the ground running with a boldly conceived concert which might be sub-titled Tragedy and Triumph. The tragedy is that of Medea as portrayed by Cherubini and famously interpreted by Maria Callas, but realised on this occasion in selected arias by the phenomenally gifted Eilana Lappalainen. The triumph is supplied – unusually unequivocally – by Tchaikovsky in his Fifth Symphony. The concert is directed by guest conductor Peter Tiboris.



Dr Haydn

Friends, Forbears and Followers

The later part of the 2009 Spring/Summer season is appropriately taken up by our homage to Haydn. It would have been unthinkable for an Oxford orchestra, based in the very building where Haydn received his doctorate in 1791, not to celebrate this towering figure of the classical era, whose recognition, amongst the very great composers, remains curiously not quite complete. Perhaps the genial 'Papa' Haydn was wont to wear his genius too lightly.

Be that as it may, mindful of his pivotal historical position, we have chosen to celebrate the good Doctor in the context of his Friends, Forbears and Followers, many of whom share his anniversary year. So, Haydn's signature work The Creation – firmly lodged in that 'English Oratorio Tradition' (largely established by Germans!) – invites comparison with Handel – and his own forbear, Purcell – and Mendelssohn. In fact, Mendelssohn and Handel coincide wonderfully in the former's revision of the latter's setting of Acis and Galatea, famously directed by the composer at Christ Church in 1733. Our performance on 3rd July of Mendelssohn's revision, in an edition commissioned by the Orchestra from the manuscript held in the Bodleian Library, will be the first in the UK in modern times.

Further Followers can be found amongst such 20th century neo-classicists as Martinu, an overt admirer represented on 30th July by his delightful Sinfonietta 'La Jolla', and, indeed, amongst the current generation. The world première of Nimrod Borenstein's newly commissioned – and clearly Haydn-inspired – The Big Bang and the Creation of the Universe features alongside works by Mendelssohn and, of course, Haydn, in the opening concert of the series on 15th May.

As for Friends, a representative pair – Pleyel and Cramer – share the billing with Dr. Haydn on 8th July when we recreate the 1791 performance of the 'Oxford' Symphony together with the sparkling Trumpet Concerto played by star trumpeter, Alison Balsom.

Other highlights include a revival of The Creation, as recently recorded to great critical acclaim with New College Choir, on the eve of 'World Creation Day', 30th May, and a visit from the distinguished Copenhagen Royal Chapel Choir to sing the 'Nelson' Mass on 19th June.

Before the Haydn festivities, we hope that our own Friends and Followers will have joined us on another symphonic adventure as we launch in February and March Brahms and the Rise of Romanticism, a series to be completed in the autumn, which presents his four symphonies in parallel with popular romantic concertos by his contemporaries.

Beyond these mainstream events the Philomusica's 2009 Spring/Summer Season finds space for the inception of our Family Concert series at the Town Hall on 5th April and two visits each, to Swindon and London. At Swindon's Wyvern Theatre the Orchestra's first full season will be completed by an all-Baroque concert on 8th February, featuring young virtuoso violinist Ruth Palmer in The Four Seasons, and a balanced blend of the classical and neo-classical on 26th April when the distinguished cellist Raphael Wallfisch joins the Orchestra in a programme of Haydn, Tchaikovsky and Mozart. Our two London appearances, rounding off a characteristically comprehensive season, comprise a glittering fund raising event at the Banqueting House on 19th March and a further visit to the Cadogan Hall on 4th June when the London première of Nimrod Borenstein's Big Bang provides a contemporary curtain-raiser to Beethoven's timeless 'Choral' Symphony.

Fundraising Concert, Dinner and Auction

Thursday 19 March 2009, Banqueting House, London



You can help us to raise much needed funds and have an unforgettable evening by joining us for our fundraising concert and dinner in the magnificent surroundings of London's Banqueting House. This Royal Palace, built in 1622 has been the setting for some of the most dramatic events in English history. Soloist for the evening is Ruth Palmer, winner of the 2007 Classical BRIT Award, and the programme will include a selection of classical favourites, such as Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, as well as music by Andrew Lloyd-Webber featuring the Oxford Philomusica Chorus. The evening is sponsored by the Oxford Philomusica's Vice President Sir Victor and Lady Blank, and Admission Passes are available at £200.

The evening will also feature an auction and silent auction, benefitting Oxford Philomusica Charitable Trust, with Lord Archer as auctioneer for some of the top prizes. Oxford Philomusica relies on its fundraising activities to maintain its programme of concerts, as well as education and community work. As for any major orchestra, ticket sales alone cover only a proportion of the costs of any concert - even a sell-out leaves us with a significant deficit. We rely on the generosity of our Friends and other supporters, and in the current economic climate, we really need your help. If you are able to make a donation, have any ideas for fundraising, or can donate a special auction prize, please do get in touch with our Development Executive, Vanessa Davis.

Oxford Philomusica 10th anniversary celebration at No. 10 Downing Street



Oxford Philomusica celebrated its 10th anniversary in style with a reception at No. 10 Downing Street hosted by Mrs Sarah Brown, the Prime Minister's wife, on 16th December. The reception was held in the State Rooms at No. 10, which were beautifully dressed for Christmas, with the addition of a grand piano, installed for the evening's festivities. The 80 guests included the Orchestra's Chairman, Sir John Baker, Oxford City Council Mayor, Susanna Pressel, Dr. John Hood, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, Oxford Philomusica's Vice-President Sir Victor Blank and many of the orchestra's loyal supporters.

Mrs Brown welcomed guests and spoke knowledgeably about Oxford Philomusica's many achievements during its first 10 years. She highlighted its meteoric growth, the calibre of its musicians, the world-famous guest artists who have performed with the orchestra, and the Orchestra's acclaimed new recording of Haydn's Creation just released. She also noted the orchestra's commitment to the education of young musicians and its award-winning community work. Oxford Philomusica's Chairman, Sir John Baker, thanked Mrs Brown and the supporters who had made all of these achievements possible.

Mrs Brown then mingled and chatted with guests and listened to Mendelssohn's Piano Trio in D Minor, led by Marios Papadopoulos and featuring Charles Mutter on violin and Peter Adams on cello. This was so well received that the trio did an unplanned encore of the second movement at the end of the evening.

Bringing Back Beethoven



The Philomusica's recent Beethoven Festival - nothing less than all nine symphonies and five piano concertos in the space of three weeks - was a multilayered celebration. At one level, as our admirable programme note writer, Nick Breckenfield, observed, the Orchestra's Festival was a 10th Anniversary 'birthday present to itself'. Indeed, few would deny that ten years of extraordinary achievement is just cause for celebration.

At another level the Festival was designed, in the words of Marios Papadopoulos, as a vehicle to 'provide an auditory experience through which the complex structures will become more apparent to the listener, while at the same time evoke feelings that we, as human beings, all share'. Few musicians are better qualified in the dual roles of pianist and conductor to provide that experience.

At yet another level, this daring project can be seen as a celebration of a central strand in the mission which the Philomusica tirelessly pursues - to bring fine live performances of the core classical repertoire to audiences of all ages, new and old. Having set the bar of responsibility so high, it behoved the Orchestra to produce worthy performances. They did - and gratifyingly large and enthusiastic audiences were there to hear and cheer them. The standing ovation which greeted the combined soloists, magnificent London Symphony Chorus and Philomusica at the end of the 'Choral' Symphony was an entirely appropriate summation of a remarkable enterprise.

'A Fresh Creation'



So ran the headline in the choral section of the December edition of BBC Music Magazine. George Hall's ensuing review of the recording made last April by the Orchestra with New College Choir is uniformly effusive in its praise for soloists, chorus, orchestra and conductor. Mhairi

Lawson, Rufus Muller and David Stout are respectively 'unfailingly beautiful in tone', agile with 'a good sense of line' and blessed with a 'rich dynamic bass', and New College Choir's 'expert delivery' ensures both 'definition and clarity.' 'Thoroughly impressive, too, is the Oxford Philomusica, the ensemble's strongly characterised tone imaginatively used to realise Haydn's many pictorial effects, while conductor Edward Higginbottom combines an essential energy with an eye for detail.'

The recording received the coveted accolade of BBC Music Choice - an especially gratifying recognition in a fiercely competitive field. Any Keynote readers who have yet to acquire their Choral CD of the Month are urged to buy their copy directly from the Philomusica office at the special price of £12.

Community and Education



Following last year's successful series of workshops at the Nuffield Orthopaedic's Centre for Enablement, we started a new programme in December, with a very successful initial workshop that was attended by a record number of participating clients. The programme continues in the New Year under the expert leadership of Tony Robb (flute) with Spike Wilson (cello) and Beth Reed (violin) forming a committed and effective team.

We plan to continue our Residency at the Pegasus School on Blackbird Leys estate next Spring with an ambitious composition project with all the Year 5's - over 60 pupils. The repertoire will be based on Holst's Planet Suite, and the project will be integrated with the school science curriculum which focuses this year on astronomy.

We have provided artistic, management and financial support to the Blackbird Leys Choir for the last two years with the objective of setting them up over time as a fully independent community choir. They now have a year's funding, a newly appointed local choir master to take over from Andy Stewart and a newly elected committee. It is time now for them to start operating independently and while we will not be renewing our formal agreement with them we certainly hope to find occasions when we can perform together in the future.

A week with Alice Hyland Operations Administrator



Monday - First thing I do on a Monday morning is to check how ticket sales have gone over the weekend. Ticket sales in the box-office are discussed like the weather, with excited emails being sent between the team if we are approaching a sell out. It's five days until our concert in the Sheldonian, so I send out an email reminder to our e-list.

Tuesday - In September, I unexpectedly found myself back at Oxford University Fresher's Fair, where I advertised the orchestra's student schemes. This morning I contact the students who signed up to the e-list and facebook group to see who is available to help at the box-office and sell programmes at our next concert. I often help the Concerts Manager, Lesley, organise the music for our concerts. The orchestra's leader has worked out the bowings for Tchaikovsky's Symphony that we are performing on 31st January, so I spend the afternoon painstakingly copying the up or down bows into the string parts.

Wednesday - This morning a letter from our last mail-out is returned in the post, as the recipient had left the address. One of my ongoing jobs is to update the database, so that promotional information is only sent out to appreciative recipients. While taking ticket requests, I have been finding out where everyone heard about our concerts for market research. Today, a patron told me how they heard about the concert through their singing teacher, who is the soloist for this coming concert.

Thursday - A new member requested to join our Friends Scheme on the phone today after thoroughly enjoying his VIP tickets to the Beethoven Festival. If you are reading this, thank you and welcome to OP keynotes! I also find I am the research engine for the orchestra. I am frequently set tasks to search the web, whether it is for a list of potential Trusts for the Development Executive, Vanessa, or unearthing obscure repertoire for the Music Director's attention.

Friday - Today I am swamped by last minute ticket requests on our new box-office number for the concert tomorrow night of Handel's Messiah. I end up selling the seats in the lower gallery with a restricted view or limited access. At the end of the day, I write the sales report for the Management Team.

Saturday - It's the day of the concert, so I arrive at midday in the office to travel up to Oxford. While it is quiet in the afternoon, half an hour before the concert everyone suddenly arrives to collect their pre-paid tickets and the Sheldonian soon fills up to the brim with people. Once I have waited for late comers at door B, I go downstairs to the drinks reception in the Cecil Jackson Room. I manage to see the last 10 minutes of the Messiah, before clearing up the Sheldonian and then directing people to the post-concert reception at Exeter College.