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## NEWSLETTER

ISSUE NO 49 CHRISTMAS 2020



### In the beginning...

Our Piano Trio Society year will end with beginnings! As we have not been able to host events during this difficult year and have little news to report in our Newsletters, we have tried instead to bring you some interesting articles from our members and distinguished friends. For this edition your editor approached a number of musicians and asked if they would write about their early lives and the way in which they were introduced to music, little dreaming of the fascinating articles which have resulted! We hope you will enjoy these glimpse into the early lives of Robert Matthew-Walker, David Owen Norris and Howard Blake, OBE and we thank them for their contributions.



Also included is an article by Deva Rossi, above, who took part in our most recent Piano Trio Day and gives a heartfelt account of the impact on students of the lockdown brought about by the Covid virus.

We are holding back our report on the Beethoven Triple Concerto until our next Newsletter.

### Annual General Meeting

We plan to hold our Annual General Meeting via Zoom on **Monday 15 February at 3.00pm** and hope as many of our members as possible will join us for this. Further details will be sent to you nearer the time. In the meantime we would like to remind you that membership for the year ends on 31 December and we hope you will renew your membership in order for us to be able to continue our work. We have kept subscriptions low but do rely on you to renew! Further details on our website or via the Administrator on [info@pianotriosociety.org.uk](mailto:info@pianotriosociety.org.uk)

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Pianist, composer, writer, broadcaster, producer and editor of Musical Opinion, Robert Matthew-Walker writes of his early life - we hope this will be the first of a series of articles!

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# PIANO TRIO SOCIETY

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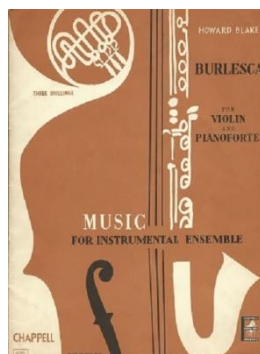
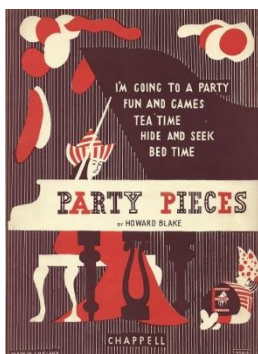
## HOW I CAME TO WRITE PIANO TRIOS

### HOWARD BLAKE

At the age of 11 I sang the lead soprano role in a week of the Gilbert and Sullivan opera 'Ruddigore' at Brighton Grammar School for boys. I was only 4 feet 9 inches tall but had sight-read the songs at an audition and got the part. Brighton and Hove Herald said: 'As Rose Maybud, 11-year old H.D.Blake gave a remarkable performance for a boy of his age. He started with the natural advantage of a sweet soprano voice, and the fun he extracted from the maiden's etiquette book was delightful. The droll effect of the duets between Robin Oakapple and Rose Maybud were heightened by a difference of more than a head and shoulders between them.'

Walking home after my first night I was caught up by a violinist from the orchestra who asked me how I had learnt to sing so well. I told him that I learnt piano with Mr. Bonney Churcher at The Preston School of Music and could sight-read and he asked if I'd like to play some piano trios one day - his friend John, who was staying with him, being lead cellist in the Sadler's Wells Opera. I was most impressed by this and couldn't wait to try it. My mother agreed and one afternoon soon after I went to his parents' large, untidy old house near Preston Park Station, not far away. We embarked on some Hummel trios and the sound of violin, cello and piano was just marvellous. It was my first experience of chamber music and I found that I could hold my own with two grown-up professionals, which to me was revelatory. Suddenly into the room swept an imposing middle-aged lady dressed all in black who stopped us in our tracks: 'What on earth are you doing playing MY trios with a small boy?!' 'He plays very well mother, just listen.' 'I have no intention of listening to a small boy usurping MY position in MY Piano Trio!' My discovery of the joy of chamber music had been short-lived since I was not permitted to play with them again. Yet the sound of it had entered my soul forever. When I got home I started to compose a piano trio with a first movement [1a]Fantasy-Allegro [/1a], a slow movement (Andante) and a scherzo (Presto). From time to time I would make the odd revision or start something else but nobody was interested and, since I didn't have a trio with which to try things out, the manuscripts were eventually put away in a cupboard. Nobody, either at home or school or church, seemed interested in the fact that I could write music.

To tell the truth, I was not sure how and for whom to write music. Whilst in the fifth form I had a pretty girl-friend called Doreen who was taking piano lessons of around Grade 5 standard. She had knitted me a bright yellow sweater for my birthday and I was so pleased that I responded by writing [1b]'Party Pieces' [/1b](four easy pieces for piano), which I copied out very carefully in ink, bound, designed a painted a cover for, and presented to her. *She was not at all pleased!* Perhaps she thought the pieces were too easy and an insult to her skills, or more likely she thought, like everybody else: 'Who do you think you are, Beethoven?' Perhaps she would have been happier with a box of chocolates? Anyway she broke off relations with me soon afterwards.



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In my last year at school, in the second-year sixth, I was suddenly and rather amazingly commissioned to write a new piece by a boy in the school. He was a good violinist called Annells and he requested a composition for violin and piano that he could play in the inter-house school music competition. I called it [1d]'Burlesca'[/1d] and he played it very well! It could justifiably be named as my first-ever commission (out of an opus output of 720 works).

Nevertheless, I progressed with my own piano studies, at 15 gaining Distinction in Grade 8, and I was suddenly brought to the attention of a notable piano teacher in Rottingdean called Maude Hornsby, who had taught two distinguished concert pianists - Kyla Greenbaum and Ronald Smith. She taught me for about five months before declaring that, sadly, she was too old and hadn't the energy to continue. She suggested to my parents that I should try for a scholarship to the RAM, and that I might try to have some lessons with a Miss Christine Pembridge, who had just become principal piano teacher at Roadean Girls School! Christine was a most cultivated lady of about 27 who had just come down from Wimbledon to live with her mother in a beautiful ancient residence called Port Hall, right opposite Brighton Grammar School.

She was a quite marvellous teacher and she put me through my paces in no uncertain way: I HAD to practise scales and arpeggios and octaves and thirds, I HAD to learn the Chopin Etudes, I HAD to commit everything to memory. After 9 months (whilst I neglected preparation for my A and S levels at school – in History, Philosophy of History and German) she entered me for The Hastings Festival Piano Scholarship (1957). I played the Bach Prelude and Fugue in B flat minor (Book 2 of the 48), Beethoven A flat sonata op.26 and Chopin Ballade in F major opus 38. It was the first time I had played at a festival (or a real public concert come to that) but I won the coveted 3-year scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music! I was flabbergasted and could scarcely believe it. Suddenly my life changed. I had to go up to London to discuss my entry to the Academy with two Wardens of the Academy, Myers Foggin and Terence Lovett. We would discuss which professors I might prefer, which subsidiary subjects I might wish to take, and I was to bring with me an example of written work (harmony and counterpoint) for them to assess. I got on well with them and said that I would naturally like my first subject to be piano and that Harold Craxton had expressed the wish to be my piano professor, and I would like my second subject to be organ since I had been preparing for an ARCO.

'Have you brought any harmony exercises with you?' Mr. Foggin said.

In fact I hadn't - I couldn't really find any, but I had remembered the piano trio in the music cupboard and managed to dig it out, bring it along and show it to them. They sat there perusing it at some length. Had I done something wrong? What was the matter? I started to fidget nervously and apologise, saying:: 'I know I was supposed to show you some counterpoint exercises.....: but they butted in and Foggin said:

Why on earth aren't you studying composition?

I replied:'I'd no idea that I could!'

Mr.Foggin said: 'I strongly advise you to take composition!' This is absolutely brilliant!

I took his advice and was given the excellent Howard Ferguson as my composition professor. Soon after taking up my scholarship, Mr. Foggin asked if I would like to meet Philip Pfaff, head of educational music at Chappell's, at that time the biggest publisher of classical music of that genre in London. I showed him 'Burlesca' , 'Party Pieces' and 'Fantasy -Trio.' and not so long after he published: Burlesca for violin and piano , 'Party Pieces' and Fantasy-allegro for piano trio ,setting me firmly on the road to my career as a composer.

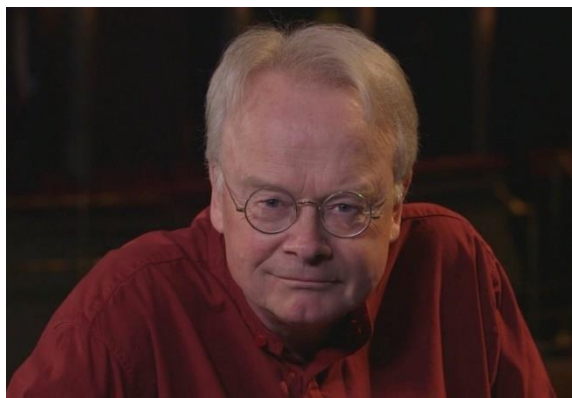
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## MY FIRST EXPERIENCE OF CHAMBER MUSIC

DAVID OWEN NORRIS



I knew some remarkable vicars when I was a child. There was Mr. McCormack, whose family would burst into a Tudor madrigal at the drop of a hat. There was Mr. Yeomans, who, faced with a leaky church roof, posted notices about our village asking ‘Are you a Coppersmith?’ The unwary enquirer would discover that a Coppersmith gave the church a penny a day, and the roof was fixed in no time. Mr. Yeomans also re-introduced Wolf Cubs into the village. ‘Dyb-dyb-dyb’, he would bellow, and ‘Dob-dob-dob’ we would reply.

A more lasting influence was Mr. Courtenay, clarinetist, country-dancer and Colditz escapee, and a product of what became my own college, Keble at Oxford. Jack was married to Alethea, a cellist, and their first care upon arrival in Northamptonshire, was to seek out a good violinist to play chamber-music. They found Mrs. Couling, a singularly well-preserved elderly lady from Flore, and quickly fixed up a music party. Now they needed a pianist, and they enlisted me. The vicarage – nowadays the Old Vicarage, of course – was just over the road from our house, and I walked up the long drive agog to see what would happen – what was this ‘chamber music’? Mozart, I recall, and there must have been the Beethoven clarinet trio too, since Jack played. My whole professional life was presented to me there in embryo, on that one occasion. I suppose I was in my early teens.

Now, Mrs. Couling was looking for an accompanist for her WI Choir in Flore, and she decided I fitted the bill. I was lucky to know her. She had been at the Royal College of Music before the Great War, so she had known Parry and Stanford and Vaughan Williams. Her father was the painter Sir James Lawton Wingate, President of the Royal Scottish Academy, and so Mrs. Couling had played in Donald Francis Tovey’s orchestra in Edinburgh in the very concerts for which he wrote his famous programme-notes – many musicians own ‘Tovey’s Analyses’ in collected book form, but I’ve got the original programmes, with that indefinably magical smell of aged paper. Besides her Edinburgh concert programmes, Mrs. Couling passed on her accumulated experience to me, on many a musical afternoon in her thatched cottage, and in the WI Choir rehearsals. ‘Remember all those things, David’, she would insist, ‘all those things’. I hope I’ve remembered most of them.

Since we met by playing piano trios, Mrs. Couling took me to hear Beethoven piano trios in Carnegie Hall – not that one, the one attached to Northampton Public Library. It was quite a concert: Hugh Bean, Daniel Barenboim and Jacqueline DuPré!

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*This piece is adapted from a stage-show currently under development with Royal & Derngate, Northampton.*

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## DAVID OWEN NORRIS

Following his introduction to chamber music David Owen Norris went on to build a varied career. It was at one of our early Piano Trio Days at the Turner Sims Hall that the Piano Trio Society first worked with him in his role as the Head of Classical Performance and Professor of Music at the University of Southampton. He is also a visiting Professor at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music, the Royal College of Organists, and the Society of Antiquaries, and an Honorary Fellow of Keble College, Oxford.

His unusually varied career has also seen him as a répétiteur at the Royal Opera House, harpist at the Royal Shakespeare Company, Artistic Director of the Petworth Festival & the Cardiff International Festival, Gresham Professor of Music, and Chairman of the Steans Institute for Singers at the Ravinia Festival in Chicago. The *Beethoven 9* app for which Norris wrote the book and the analyses won the Best Music App Award in April 2014.

David Owen Norris, the first winner of the Gilmore Artist Award, has played concertos all over North America and Australia, along with several appearances in the BBC Proms. A television programme entirely devoted to his work on the Elgar Piano Concerto, ending with a spectacular live performance of the whole work, has been shown frequently. He began his career by accompanying such artists as Dame Janet Baker, Sir Peter Pears & Jean-Pierre Rampal. His ambitious complete Sullivan song project will soon be augmented by a third disc on the Chandos label. He has recorded his own *Piano Concerto in C* with the BBC Concert Orchestra. His other concerto recordings include works by Lambert, Phillips, Horowitz & Arnell. David Owen Norris also plays early pianos. His discovery that the World's First Piano Concertos were written around 1770 in London for the tiny square piano led to a complete reconsideration of that instrument, with an epoch-making recording, and concerto tours of Britain, Europe and America. His latest Hyperion recording, *The Jupiter Project*, features virtuoso 1820s re-writes of Mozart.

David Owen Norris has been a familiar face on music television since 1990, when he presented *The Real Thing?: Questions of Authenticity* on BBC2: its analysis of the issues, in discussion with Pierre Boulez, John Eliot Gardiner, Reinhard Goebel, Ton Koopman & Raymond Leppard, set an agenda for a generation. His analysis of *Jerusalem* in the Prince of Wales's programme on Sir Hubert Parry in 2011 sent critics into unprecedented raptures and his *Chord of the Week* has helped make BBC2's *Proms Extra* one of the most watched classical music programmes in the world. *Perfect Pianists*, which he presented from Chopin's Pleyel piano, has been shown regularly on BBC4. He has a long history with Radio 3, which discovered him as a young artist: in his first few years as a solo performer he made over two hundred broadcasts.

David Owen Norris's rise as a composer is more recent. Audiences have been discovering his music through a series of major works: the oratorio *Prayerbook*, the Piano Concerto in C, both recorded commercially, and the Symphony; as well as smaller works, already much loved, like the song-cycles *Think only this* and *Tomorrow nor Yesterday*, the cantata *STERNE, was THE MAN* and the much-toured and frequently broadcast radio-opera *Die! Sober Flirter*, the last-named a BBC commission. He wrote two large-scale works in 2015: *Turning Points*, a celebration of democracy supported financially by the Agincourt600 Committee, which had its fourth performance in February 2017 in a packed Winchester Cathedral; and *HengeMusic*, a multi-media piece for organ and saxophone quartet with film and poetry, supported by Arts Council England, which has had several performances, with a recording in preparation.

Finally, we have been delighted that David Owen Norris has added the role of Vice President of the Piano Trio Society to this splendid list!

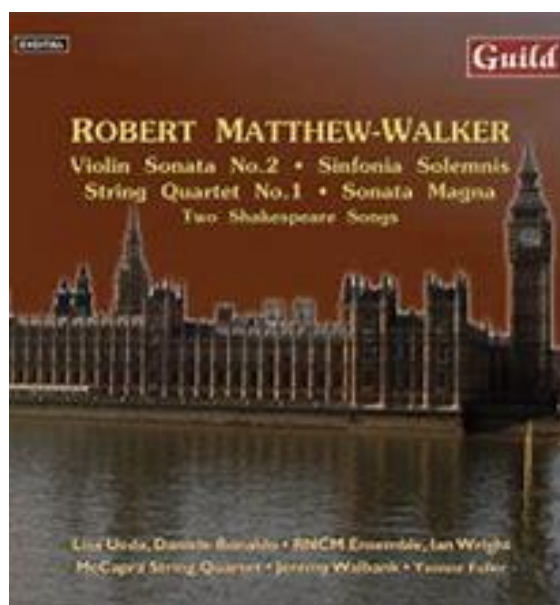


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## MY EARLY LIFE IN MUSIC

### ROBERT MATTHEW-WALKER



#### An introduction by Christine Talbot-Cooper

I have known Robert Matthew-Walker (known to most as Bob!) for many years as a respected music critic and composer and recently for his work as Editor of the fabulous Musical Opinion magazine. He has a fund of interesting stories and when looking for suitable articles for the current magazine I approached Bob to see if he could find a few minutes to write an article for us. When he asked about subject matter I suggested that he might like to write about the beginnings of what was to become a long and varied career in music. On presenting the article to me, Bob apologized that he had only completed the first chapter and said I could cut as necessary. However on reading it I was fascinated at all the interesting connections, and decided that I could not possibly cut any of it! I hope you will also find it interesting, so - here is the first article from Bob!

Christine Talbot-Cooper's kind invitation to write something about my musical life is literally the first time I have been asked, and whilst I don't think my life in music has been anything special to write home about, others have disagreed. I suppose in the last sixty to seventy years (I am now 81) I have been fortunate to meet some remarkable and truly great musicians and I have played a part in the careers of many of them, so I'll begin.

I was born in South-east London six weeks before World War II broke out. My parents were both in their forties when I arrived, and were a working-class couple, who had met and married 21 years before after my father (one of seven children) had enlisted in the Loyal North Lancashire Fusiliers soon after World War I had broken out, along with his four other brothers as well as their father (!) – they all enlisted on the same day.

My father's family lived in Bolton in Lancashire. My father was wounded on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, and invalided back to England. Whilst recuperating from a major operation in 1917, from which thankfully he made a complete recovery, he was nursed by my mother. She in turn was one of eleven children, and her mother, my grandmother, was the District Nurse in Eltham. She had been put in charge of a big house that had been taken over for wounded soldiers recovering from surgery. My grandmother commandeered five of her daughters as nurses, which is how my parents met – my mother nursing my father back to health.

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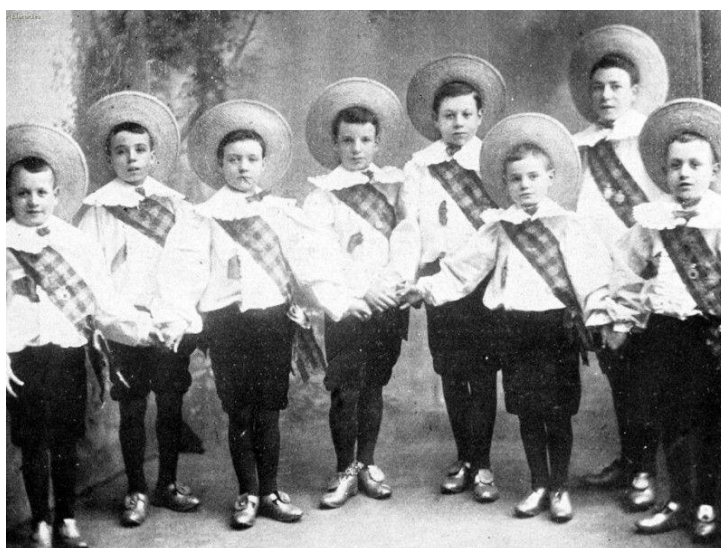
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In 1939, when I was born, I had a 14-year-old sister and a 20-year-old brother who before I was born had already enlisted in the British Expeditionary Force which meant that he was at Dunkirk; four years later, he returned on D-Day and made it to Berlin. He was a brave man, as was my father and his brothers and father.

This fragment of autobiography has little – thus far – to do with me or music, but I happen to believe that musical inclinations are inherited, even at several generations' distance, and whilst on my mother's side of the family the only person who might conceivably fall into that category is one of my 71 cousins – the actor Walter Sparrow, who appeared in many TV sitcoms in England (including *One Foot in the Grave*, and *Only Fools and Horses*) and in several important Hollywood films (*Robin Hood*, *Prince of Thieves*, especially), and was a good guitarist, the stronger musical strain came from my father's side – but not wholly professionally. His father, my paternal grandfather, who died aged 90 in 1938 – he had been born in Glasgow in 1849 – was, in later life in the 1920s and early '30s a well-known clog-dancer in the working-class public houses in Bolton – appearing nightly on stage for his fee (four pints of bitter).

My mother loved music, although she got precious little time to hear it. In the late 1920s and early 30s, Sir Thomas Beecham would take the big 3,000-seater Lewisham Hippodrome music hall in Catford (a bus ride away) for several weeks during which he would put on the British National Opera season – a different opera every night, sung in English. My mother would go regularly to hear good British singers in *Boheme*, *Butterfly*, *Tosca*, *Manon*, *Carmen*, *Faust* – and so on. Before 1933, the local buses would line up to wait for the final curtain to take the audience home. But the London Passenger Transport Board was formed in 1933, timetables were introduced and the last bus would often have left before the opera finished: leaving audiences with long walks home! That really was the end of my mother's opera-going.

One of my father's brothers was also a professional dancer and – before World War I – had joined a troupe of Music Hall entertainers known as the Eight Lancashire Lads. They became friendly with Charlie Chaplin and went with him in about 1910 to Hollywood where they appeared in a number of early comic silent films. But it didn't work out for my Uncle Jimmy and in early 1914 he returned to Bolton – and, a few months later, entered the War with his brothers and their father.



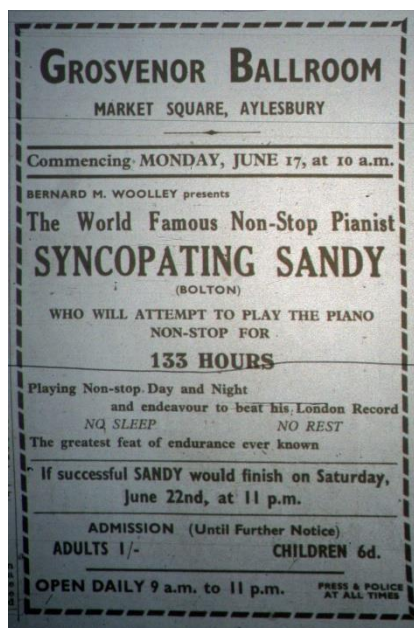
**Eight Lancashire Lads including Charlie Chaplin**

After the death of my father's mother (who was Welsh, and didn't speak a word of English until she was 33 – when she married) my grandfather married again in the 1920s and had two more children. Incidentally, his father had been born in 1789 and served with Nelson at Waterloo – he was a powder monkey, but not on Nelson's ship.

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A cousin of mine, on my father's side, had shown great musical gifts and formed his own dance band in the early 1930s – his name was Sandy Strickland, and after World War II became famous as the 'World-Champion Non-Stop Piano Player.'



Sandy, whom I got to know quite well, was managed by my Uncle Jimmy (of the Lancashire Lads) and they would hire a local theatre for an entire week, and have a grand piano on the stage. Beginning at 9.00am on the Monday, Sandy would play the piano non-stop until the following Saturday night (!!). Truly. He never took a break for sleep. For eating and drinking he would take the sandwiches or whatever with one hand whilst he continued to play with the other. In more intimate moments during the nights, a screen would be drawn around him for a few moments

The theatre would remain open 24 hours a day and the entrance fee was one shilling (5p). Patrons (you don't see that word often these days) could stay as long as they liked. Sandy was a brilliant pianist and in the 1930s his dance band was famous across northern England, especially in Manchester, Blackburn and Bolton. I'm not sure whether they made any commercial recordings, I don't think they did, but as editor now of the

quarterly classical music publication *Musical Opinion*, John Byrne, our regular Manchester correspondent for the Hallé, BBC Philharmonic and Opera North, told me that 'Syncopating Sandy Strickland' is still recalled with affection by older Lancastrians.

I played for Sandy twice – once at his home – when I had begun to take music seriously – but I was nowhere near his equal technically. These meetings were when I had begun to take piano lessons in the early 1950s after I had won a place at a London Grammar School.

In the years following the end of the War (VE Night remains a vivid memory for me!) and my brother's safe return from Berlin, music in our home was solely through the radio and it was during the latter half of the 1940s that my own love of music began to grow, helped by us acquiring an old harmonium, in good condition, on which I used to play and pick out my own tunes. My parents could not afford lessons – nor did I want to have them: I was quite happy in my own music-making.

My mother would have the radio on pretty much all the time throughout the day whilst by father was at work: I never knew how it came about, but he secured a job before I was born as a King's Messenger: he would take hand-written notes and letters from King George VI to the Prime Minister and other dignitaries and back again – in a chauffeur-driven Army Staff Car!

There was no music involved in that, of course, but I vividly remember classical music being frequently broadcast on both the Home Service and Light Programme – the Third Programme was never heard at home in those years! – and I would often just listen to music any time of day.

At primary school, which I started when I was six, I found myself able to recall popular songs almost at will – especially the latest from Donald Peers! – and I would just sing them to the other children if asked to. I didn't think there was anything special in being able to recall songs after just one hearing – I thought anyone should be able to do that – but when I went to grammar school in 1950 I found my musical inclinations received an immense boost as a whole world of music was suddenly made available to me. My primary school singing to the class stood me in good stead when I was told I had an exceptional treble voice and I



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was immediately told to join the school choir. I took to it as the proverbial duck to water: the first choral piece I ever sang was Handel's 'Let Their Celestial Concerts all Unite' from *Samson* which we sang at Southwark Cathedral. My school had been founded in 1571 and had close associations with the Cathedral – John Harvard, founder of Harvard University in the USA, was an early pupil, and Southwark Cathedral has a chapel named in his honour



**Savoy Chapel nave**

Within a few months, never missing a choir practice, I was one of ten boys selected to form the Choir of the Queen's Chapel of the Savoy, which had the unforgettable Dr Henry Bromley-Derry as Master of the Music. Under him, my love of music and my voice blossomed, but he fell ill with cancer and although the two years of his training were unforgettable and wholly exceptional, the standard of the choir was not maintained when he was away for months on end. He eventually passed away in 1953.

That was Coronation Year, and whilst it was customary for the Queen's Chapel Choir to sing at Coronations – as they had in 1937 and 1911 – only two boys were granted the privilege in 1953, and I wasn't one of them. By that time the dreaded onset of puberty had affected my voice, and whilst I could cover its changing timbres with a decent falsetto, my voice wasn't truly up to it.

But the Coronation music inspired me: we all sang from the service. My first encounter with Parry's 'I Was Glad' – through the 78 discs of the 1937 live Coronation Service – and with Vaughan Williams's 'O Taste and See' and Walton's thrilling new 'Te Deum' – both written for the 1953 Coronation, I immersed myself in the music of those great composers.

I dived in, head-first. In 1953 I had no idea that I would later meet Walton and get to know his wife after his death, as well as becoming a regular visitor to Vaughan Williams' widow's home in Camden Town – or with my wife and son spend a week's holiday with Ursula Vaughan Williams in Avignon. But in 1953 I was taking music very seriously indeed and had even begun to compose some little pieces for choir – some chants, a set of Versicles and Responses and a setting of The Lord's Prayer for tenor and treble voices (inspired I think by Mario Lanza in *The Great Caruso* – an amazing film at the time).

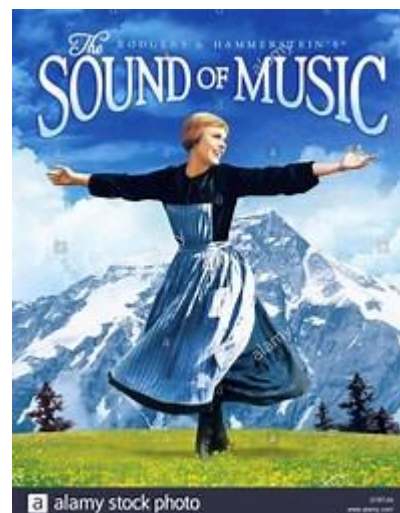
But my own music was pretty poor, although I knew – even then – that I wanted to write music. This ambition was helped by my dear parents who bought me a proper piano and paid for piano lessons after school; my teacher was John Streets, whom I revered. I had no idea then of course that he was to become a professor at the Royal Academy of Music but he must have sensed I had something worthwhile as I showed him my boyish compositions (including an immense – thankfully unfinished – symphony for solo piano, chorus, narrator and large orchestra (!!)).

John Streets and the school's music masters found me a willing participant in all musical endeavours, including going to orchestral concerts. In this, I had been fortunately primed by my father buying a television set in 1949 (which must have been a considerable outlay for him.; he was never what one might call 'well paid'), which I watched avidly. I can still recall 15-minute televised piano recitals by Gerald Moore and Lev Pouishnoff, and from the Proms Liszt's Hungarian fantasia played by the legendary Mark Hambourg and Beethoven's Triple Concerto with Solomon, Manoug Parikian and a cellist whose name I forget under Wilhelm Furtwängler.

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On a lighter side, I recall vividly the first ever appearance on television by Julie Andrews (then 14 years old) with her parents Ted and Barbara – thirty years later, as head of Classical Music at RCA Records in London, I astonished her and her husband Blake Edwards with my recollections of her TV debut, when I hosted a reception to present her with a gold disc marking a million sales of the soundtrack LP of 'The Sound of Music'. It was several days before I washed that side of my face where she kissed me!



About a year before my voice, falsetto or not, finally gave up, the great William Cole was appointed to succeed Bromley-Derry at Savoy Chapel, and I knew that I had come into contact with a number of musicians several cubits higher than most of those I had sung under these past few years.

But the experiences had been life-changing. Our school had an orchestra (of sorts, with a continuous piano obligato filling in for the absent instruments), and I was appointed timpanist. I jumped at the chance, as I knew my piano-playing was not really good enough on the technical side. I was thrilled when the violinist I had seen under Furtwängler (Manoug Parikian) came to conduct us in a concert that included Holst's 'Two Hymns' and Handel's 'Zadok the Priest' - and the Third Brandenburg Concerto and Elgar's Opus 20 Serenade.

A year before, I had fallen down the stairs at home. The result was a painful condition which led to an operation on my left knee; this 'left internal meniscectomy' led me to miss several months of education (I was in a hospital bed for six weeks before having to learn to walk again). My education, in the vital months before taking my GCEs, was effectively ruined and although I returned to school three weeks before the exams began, I was in no true state to sit them (at times, almost literally).

On paper, my education would seem to have been a failure: my parents could truly no longer afford to support me for another year or so, as they approached retirement age, and my brother and sister were both married with children of their own. I had no choice but to leave school with no qualifications but a burning desire to make music central to my life.

My first job was in a local factory as a warehouse boy, at three pounds ,five shillings (£3.25p) a week – *a week*, I might add – and every Saturday I would take what was left over after paying my mother housekeeping and go to London, spending the money on music and on nothing else. The Gramophone Exchange, Foyles, HC Harridge, Chesters, Discurio, Travis & Emery – these were the Holy Grails I frequented at every opportunity.

My parents had bought me a record player to replace my older 'wind-up gramophone' and it was the second-hand record market I frequented most, yet I always found money for manuscript paper, as I found myself writing music at almost every free opportunity after work.

Our local library was, thankfully, an excellent one: just round the corner from our home, it had a surprisingly big stock of music and books on music – The (1950) Record Guide was one of my Bibles – and of course we still had the piano at home though the old harmonium was long gone.

The Library also had posters advertising local organisations of all kinds – and two of them caught my eye: one for The Eltham Music Club and another for Recorded Hours of Music –Eltham. These were both gramophone societies who met weekly (not, thankfully, on the same evening). I joined both and soon found

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the Eltham Music Club rather more to my taste – both societies met in public houses (in ‘rooms above’) – the Eltham Music Club had a larger membership, which was quite lively and all members were more or less about my age. But I soon found that my knowledge of music, and of recordings, which I always took for granted – for some reason, I found it almost impossible to forget a musical fact once I had encountered it – was far superior to that of any of the other members.



At that time, in the mid- to late- 1950s, Adult Education was still strongly supported by local councils and I also lost no time in joining a Music Appreciation class which was run by a wonderful lady, Mary Baddeley, who was an excellent pianist. I soon found that I knew more about music than any of the other ‘students’, most of whom were older than I was, and Ms Baddeley and I soon struck up a warm friendship.

Imagine my astonishment when one evening she arrived with her husband, who had brought a violin. My astonishment was that her husband was Arthur Leavins, above, leader of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Sir Thomas Beecham, whose latest recording I had bought the previous week!

As you may imagine, Arthur and I soon ‘hit it off’ and I was invited to tea the following Sunday at their home in Bromley. Arthur was interested to see some of my compositions – which had grown in terms of practical musicality as a result of my constant home-studies. I learned that ‘self-taught’ had considerable advantages.

Arthur played some of my music at their home and gave me much valuable advice. He also arranged for me to have complimentary tickets for many RPO concerts and other concerts with which he was associated: with Mary also my new piano teacher, my accomplishments proceeded by leaps and bounds; she also taught at Goldsmith’s College, part of the University of London, and I was enrolled there as an extra-student through her good offices.

By that time I had left my job as a warehouse boy, and through a kindly lady who was the Personnel Officer at the factory where I first started work, she found me a job at Boosey & Hawkes printing department in the basement of 29 Berners Street in the West End. It was not much more money (still less than £4 a week!) but the environment was much more to my liking.

Mary Baddeley was keen to put on a small concert of 20<sup>th</sup>-century music, and she got me to play the piano part in Darius Milhaud’s Suite for Clarinet Violin and Piano. At the same time, Milhaud himself was coming to London to conduct the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Just a few months before his visit, Arthur had left the RPO to join the BBC Symphony, sitting on first desk of the violins alongside Paul Beard.

Arthur had arranged tickets for me for the Maida Vale broadcast and I went to hear Milhaud conduct his new Sixth Symphony. I could never, in my wildest dreams, have imagined that within five years I would be studying composition with Milhaud at his home in Paris on a weekly basis!

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## A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE ON COVID

DEVA ROSSI



Chamber music has always been a great passion of mine. I love creating and communicating music with others. As a pianist I never enjoyed the lonely aspect of my job and chamber music brought me great joy as I felt part of something special.

In my four years at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, I had many great opportunities that allowed me to explore different ensembles and styles. I knew from my first year that I wanted to focus on chamber and I was part of a piano trio for four years. Some of my highlights include a concert in the Dora Stoutzker Hall, coaching from the Gould Trio and the Piano Trio Day in Gloucester we were kindly invited to in 2019.

In my last year of undergraduate, I decided to choose the major chamber module as I knew it would be an exciting opportunity. February and March were going to be the busiest months for my group. We had a few concerts in February but March was going to be the highlight. We had our chamber exam during the first week and were then chosen to participate in the Piano Trio Competition at Chetham's School of Music. I had been thinking about the competition since the year before when I first heard about it. It was a truly marvellous time. I really was enjoying my life; it felt fulfilling to be able to do something I enjoy so much every day. I usually do not enjoy competitions but being able to prepare for it with amazing musicians was truly terrific.

I vividly remember the beginning of March like it was yesterday. I come from Switzerland so I heard many stories from my family back home of the situation but I never thought our lives would change so quickly. I remember that we had a concert the week college announced its indefinite closure. We were not sure the concert was going to happen either but looking back, I am so grateful that it did. I got to perform one last time knowing it was going to be long before I could perform again. Flash forward to eight months after and I still have not performed in a live concert yet.

The few days before the concert were frantic. My flight got cancelled twice so I decided to stay in Cardiff. I never had any sort of keyboard in my room so I desperately asked friends to lend me anything they had. My luck came instantly and I will be forever grateful to my landlord and teacher at Royal Welsh: Lucy Robinson. She lives right at the end of my street and allowed me to practice, follow my lessons, record videos throughout the pandemic on her grand piano, from March until June. I do not know what I would have done without her help. It was also at that time that I realised how helpful the staff at college was. We were receiving caring emails every day, we were constantly being checked on, I never once felt lonely. I knew I was not going through this crazy experience alone and it was sincerely wonderful.



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The first few weeks were strange and quite sad. I was so used to going to college every single day for hours and now suddenly I was home. I am a very active and organized person and I thrive with stress and being busy. I felt lost.

This is when my head of department Simon Philipppo came up with weekly programmes for us. He created a list of assignments we could look at each week and we then would have a meeting to discuss them. These assignments included reading articles, researching about famous pianists, listening to recitals. This helped me as it gave some structure to my week and I finally knew I was working for a class: I had some goals to achieve.

I obviously still had my piano lessons as there was a final recital to prepare. This was probably the hardest aspect of the whole situation. I remember my first day of my first year when we had a meeting with the principal in the Dora Stoutzker Hall. Walking in the hall was a breathtaking experience. For four years I would go to concerts there, I would watch masterclasses and I always kept thinking about my final recital as the peak of my hard work throughout the degree. When I found out that it was sadly not possible, I was devastated. It was very hard to digest. Knowing that after four years my recital would be only a recording for myself was something I thought would never happen. I focused on the positive aspects in my life and realised that it was okay. My family and friends were healthy and that was more important. I was also aware of the fact that I will always have this recording of my recital knowing how hard it was at the time and that definitely helped too.

The whole experience has definitely affected me and changed me but I also grew as a person and as a musician. It also only made my dreams stronger. I have now more drive to create chamber music and achieve my goals for the future. I have moved from Cardiff to Antwerp for my masters and I am currently in another piano trio. I appreciate every rehearsal, every lesson, every opportunity to create music together. I have never been happier.

Music is a strong and accessible means of communication, and I appreciate its power even more during these hard times. I am so grateful that I get to create something so special and unique. Particularly in the last few months, I have realised how important chamber music is for me as it allows me to connect with people from all over the world in a language that is so exceptional and remarkable.



**Deva Rossi with the Concordia Piano Trio and John Thwaites - Piano Trio Day 2019**

I would like to personally thank Christine and the Piano Trio society for allowing me to write an article about my experience as a music student during these tough times.

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## NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS

Composer **Adrian Williams** has been arranging some of the string quartets of the late American composer Steven Gerber for orchestra and has worked with the English Symphony Orchestra, for whom he is John McCabe Composer-in- Association, to record the new arrangements. The Steven Gerber Trust in the US have been so impressed by these and the collaboration with the ESO that they have given a grant to enable a recording of Adrian's First Symphony to be made with the ESO next year in addition to commissioning a Second Symphony to be recorded in 2021

The ESO has recorded two of Adrian's pre-existing works, Russells' *Elegy* and also *Migrations* for 22 solo strings which is probably one of his most important compositions. Other recordings are to follow including the Violin Concerto commissioned for Zoe Beyers (ESO leader and also BBC Phil leader).

A busy year for Adrian!

More recording news comes from composer **Ian Wilson** who is based in Ireland. The most important of these is called "Wild is the wind", a portrait CD of chamber music released on the Diatribe label <https://shop.diatribe.ie/album/wild-is-the-wind>. This was launched at the Contemporary Music Centre Ireland by CMC Director, Evonne Ferguson, and included specially recorded performances from two of the performers on the album - saxophonists Ties Mellema and Cathal Roche - alongside conversations with Ian Wilson.

In October, the Serbian piccolo player Snjezana Pavicevic released her debut CD called "Piccolo Solo Globe Tour" - <https://album.link/dRKBCqRKXKV7>, which features his piece "The Twittering Machine".

In November the NDR Choir (Hamburg) released a CD called "nine(birds)here", which features music by Ian and Ivan Moody, including two of his a cappella choral works and "Little red fish" for choir and the Raschèr Saxophone Quartet (<https://www.jpc.de/jpcng/classic/detail/-/art/nine/hnum/10322247>).

Corporate member **BAPAM** tells us that during the course of this year they have seen a big increase in those reaching out with mental health problems. Speaking at their first CPD event held for Practitioners titled: *Lockdown Health of Performance Professionals*, BAPAM CEO, Claire Cordeaux, talked about the factors that were creating this need for support. She mentioned experience of patients' struggles with loss of work and worries about sustaining their careers, impacts on creativity and identity, and feelings of demotivation.

In practical terms she said:

"Our case mix changed – fewer work-related musculoskeletal problems, and a considerable increase in people presenting with mental health problems (up from 15% to 26% of total cases). Of these, around a third of people presented with moderate to severe mental health problems (previously 12%) Seeing these statistics and the obvious need for consistent and ongoing support and signposting we have also created a factsheet for those needing immediate help in a mental health crisis. It includes information about all the organisations who can help. **BAPAM Factsheet – Mental Health Support in a Crisis**

Meantime we continue to provide free mental health assessments for performers with our GPs and psychologists."

Corporate member **EPTA** has worked hard throughout the year to keep its members up to date with the rapidly moving changes brought about by Covid. There have been many Webinars featuring a variety of topics held throughout the year.

In December the news was announced that Murray McLachlan (pictured left) would be standing down as Chair of EPTA and Editor of Piano Professional. Mark Tanner was elected as interim chair, with Karen Marshall as interim vice chair.

Murray has been an inspiration to EPTA and will be sadly missed.



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**Robert Max and the Barbican Piano Trio**, organisers of the Frinton Festival were determined that music should continue in spite of the virus, and Robert sent us this happy report in November.

"We are delighted that careful planning and fortuitous timing allowed us to present three superb Frinton Festival 2020 concerts last month.

Frinton rarely has the opportunity to welcome artists as distinguished as Ian Bostridge CBE and Julius Drake. I am sure that those who were fortunate to obtain tickets will agree with me when I describe the concert as one of the great concert-going experiences of my life. Julius thanked the audience after the concert for "listening" and Ian said:

*"It's so amazing for us (as you must know, being a performer yourself) to perform to live audiences in these times. And you made it possible."*

Our Barbican Piano Trio was delighted to return to Frinton to play music by Beethoven and Smetana on Saturday evening and the final concert on Sunday afternoon brought together eight of the UK's top musicians to perform Schubert's Octet, a masterpiece which is by turn profoundly moving and charming. The magnificent team included principal players from the London Symphony and London Chamber Orchestras, one of whom wrote:

*"This is pure happiness; playing the masterpiece that is the Schubert Octet with amazing musicians, to a socially distanced live audience (finally)! Thank you Frinton Festival for organising and proving so excellently that IT IS possible!! We need more of these kinds of live concerts of chamber music to be happening here in the UK!"*

Meanwhile Vice President **Howard Blake**, composer of music for The Snowman, saw the full-length cinema version film of the live stage show shown in Dubai in December. Also in December "The Bear", for which he wrote music and lyrics, was shown in a concert version with projected film at the National Kaolsiung Arts Center Weiwuying with conductor Stuart Hancock. November saw a performance of his "Sinfonietta" in Leeds, performed by the Opera North Brass Ensemble, whilst guitarist Paul Gregory included the "Prelude, Sarabande and Gigue for Solo Guitar" in his recital in October. 2021 will see the performance of Howard's Flute Concerto in Lewes by Anna Hodgson on 16 January and a performance of his Piano Quartet, with a distinguished line-up, including Howard on piano, will be streamed from St Mary's Church, Perivale on 16 May.

We were pleased to have news of the **Fidelio Trio** from Penny Wright, at Syde Manor, near Cheltenham.

"I'm delighted to say that a week ago we hosted the filming of two concerts for the **Fidelio Trio Winter Chamber Music Festival**, which is normally based in Dublin at the end of November each year. They can be found via the festival website on <https://www.fideliotriowinterfestival.org/our-2020-festival>. The concerts are free to watch but there is a donate button and I know that all donations would be gratefully received."

New music and Irish composers have always played a key role in Fidelio Trio's programming and they include two world premières this year. They are British composer, Robert Saxton, in his elegiac Fantasy Pieces and a GlasDrum / Arts Council of Ireland-supported festival commission from Irish composer, David Fennessy, of a new piano trio honouring the memory of the original Fidelio Trio pianist Spencer Boney, on this the 25th anniversary of his tragic death. To celebrate Beethoven's 250th anniversary his epic Archduke Trio is paired with Enniskillen's Joan Trimble with her 1940 Phantasy Trio, a Cobbett Prize-winning work at the Royal College of Music and a French-themed programme featuring Irish flute player Emer McDonough in Debussy's haunting Syrinx, a work to commemorate Eric Sweeney who died in 2020, Ravel, Franck and the world premiere of a rarity by Erik Satie arranged by John White. Also included were in-depth composer interviews and digital masterclasses as part of the composition education event, Project Prelude, in association with the Contemporary Music Centre.

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## DUMA MUSIC, INC

Following the article about Edition Silvertrust in our last Newsletter we have discovered another small publisher in USA which may be of interest to you. We asked **Oleksander Kuzyszyn** (pictured below) to tell us how Duma Music began.



Duma Music, Inc. was founded in 1985 by Oleksander and Olga Kuzyszyn (that would be me and my wife), with the original mission of providing professionally arranged sheet music editions of Ukrainian pop songs for use by the many Ukrainian dance bands active in the United States and Canada at that time. We quickly realized that, going forward, this would be a limited market, which likely would diminish with time. We then pivoted to publishing contemporary classical music, which is actually my first love. I am a classically trained pianist, with an M.A. in music theory from Columbia University, and although my own gigs were predominantly club dates (I finally gave these up three years ago, after 42 years) and occasional recording sessions, publishing gave me the opportunity to remain active in classical music. Thus, I straddled the worlds of classical and pop.

In the early 1990s, I had the good fortune to meet some of Ukraine's leading composers, who travelled to the U.S. for performances of their works. The most notable of these was Myroslav Skoryk, a world class composer, who sadly, passed away earlier this year. To my surprise and delight, he agreed to have Duma Music, Inc. publish some of his works - probably as

much a testament to the sorry state of music publishing in Ukraine, as to his faith in me. Nevertheless, we commenced upon a highly productive business relationship which still continues, despite his passing. Fortunately, I managed to generate many more performances for Mr. Skoryk in the U.S., as well as to negotiate a number of mechanical and synchronization licenses on his behalf. Duma Music, Inc. has also published the works of Mr. Skoryk's contemporaries - Ivan Karabyts, Leonid Hrabovsky, Alexander Krasotov and others.

We are by no means, however, limiting ourselves to publishing the music of Ukrainian composers. Our newest signee is the talented Minnesota based American composer Scott Aaron Miller. And one of our best-selling publications is a folio of Puccini opera aria arrangements for piano solo by New Yorker Christopher Freyer. Our pre-eminent consideration is the merit of the music itself, regardless of the composer's background or reputation.

Below is the link to our website, which I hope will provide more information:

**<http://dumamusic.com/home.html>**

We are pleased to report that the Duma Music catalogue includes a number of pieces for piano trio.

**A note from Christine Talbot-Cooper, Editor.**

**We are always pleased to receive articles or ideas for articles on topics of general interest as well as those directly connected to piano trios.**

**Please contact me to discuss on 01242 620736 or email [info@pianotriosociety.org.uk](mailto:info@pianotriosociety.org.uk)**