

AUTUMN/WINTER 2023 | ISSUE 136

# Double Reed | NEWS

The magazine of the British Double Reed Society

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# Notes from the Chair

James Turnbull



Welcome to the final issue of DRN for 2023! It has been a busy year for the BDRS and this issue sees the announcement of several exciting pieces of news. Before I go further, however, I would like to thank everyone who was involved in the Double Reed Festival held at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire in May (reported in DRN135). It's through the collective efforts of participants, traders, artists and volunteers that we were able to create such a fantastic and memorable event. My extra thanks go to everyone at the RBC for their generosity and support, as well as their dedication to working with us to build such a great double reed day.

At the time of writing, the committee is working hard to prepare the forthcoming double reed event at the Royal Academy of Music as well as laying plans for 2024.

During the year we have been tightening up several areas of governance, including safeguarding, and developing an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy for the BDRS. Thanks to the incredible donation by a member who wishes to remain anonymous, the scope of what BDRS undertakes to further double reed music is about to take a significant leap forwards. As a committee we are working on several new initiatives that will offer more for our members. This includes the creation of an Instrument Bank, and developing much more content online for our members to access exclusively.

I want to take a moment to celebrate two remarkable individuals who have been instrumental in the shaping of BDRS. Both Michael Britton and Bob Codd have celebrated significant birthdays recently and I wish to extend our many thanks for the roles both these people have played over the years in the BDRS.

I hope you enjoy the final issue of DRN for 2023, and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at forthcoming BDRS events in October. Do stay connected with us through our website and social media channels for the latest updates on concerts and double reed playing opportunities.

As ever, I am very pleased to hear from members about what we can do to offer our membership more. If you know of double reed events or schemes that need our support, I would love to hear from you. Wishing you the very best in your music making for the rest of 2023!

Last but not least, a heartfelt thank you to Clive Fairbairn, the editor of Double Reed News, as he celebrates the monumental achievement of editing his 100th issue. Everyone at BDRS is incredibly grateful for the outstanding and dedicated work that Clive consistently brings to the magazine. His tireless efforts have played a significant role in shaping the success of Double Reed News, and we look forward to many more issues under his expert guidance.

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Cover photo: The Royal Academy of Music, London. Credit: Philafrenzy (own work)  
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# Editor's Comment

Clive Fairbairn

If you saw the recent BBC1 programme *Living Next Door to Putin* you will know that, whilst travelling the length of the European/Russian border, journalist Katya Adler spends time in the Baltic States of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. One of the sights she visits is the powerful Hill of Crosses, a photo of which appears in this issue (Page 10). Oboist Andrea Ridilla was also touring these countries this summer, participating in the College Music Society International Conference, which meets every other year in a significant cultural location. She provides her own reflection on music and culture in these former Soviet satellites.

Writing this as the hefty BBC Proms reaches its monumental finale, it is good to note that the festival not only survives but thrives. What's more, during the 2023 season, concerts in the vastness of the Royal Albert Hall have frequently sold out. If this is reflected in attendance at the many regional summer festivals of serious music there is hope to believe that live music has now recovered from the disastrous affects of the Covid pandemic. But is this reflected in music education, outreach, instrumental learning and GCSE/A-level study in schools? The signs are not so encouraging.

Liz Fyfe (Page 21) expresses the doubts many of us have with regard to the take-up of oboe and bassoon by the young. Yet there are also several good examples in this edition of initiatives aimed at correcting this situation, beginning with Wells Cathedral School's Summer School. Read also about the Royal College of Music (Page 35) and Rebecca Taylor's Final Project at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (Page 19). The BDRS itself is taking several leads as you would expect, including the establishment of an Instrument Bank (Page 20), and also by supporting regional double reed events that provide opportunities for participation and progress.

Work continues on our 2023 project to make all the back issues of your magazine accessible and searchable for content that particularly interests you. The technical side of this should soon be resolved making it one of the many distinct benefits of membership of this Society. Meanwhile, our present bumper issue of DRN features familiar authors on all kinds of topics, whether applauding youthful enterprise or long service, and whether casting a look backwards or into the future. I particularly welcome new writer Ellen Wilkinson; she describes the genesis and growth of her work with the Antigua and Barbuda Youth Symphony Orchestra which began while she was at the Purcell School. Your feedback is always welcome and please tell your story through the pages of your magazine. The next copy deadline is 15th December.

## Two corrections to recent editions

In the last issue we published a review by George Caird of a CD by Catherine and Christopher Williams (oboe and piano). In the first paragraph, a third member of the family was invented, called 'Richard'! We apologise for any confusion and confirm that only Christopher's name should have appeared alongside Catherine's.

And in the edition before that (ie DRN134) another name change occurred (on Page 12) '...a stunning performance by Helen Mackie on cor anglais' should have read 'Helena Mackie'. As an oboist, Helena would certainly not wish to be missing her 'A'! We congratulate Helena, who has just been appointed Principal Oboe with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra on the retirement of Jonathan Small.





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# Reflections with Michael Britton

George Caird

George continues our celebration of Michael's 80th birthday.



There is certainly no stopping Michael Britton and his wife Hilary. I met them on a sunny day at the end of July in the Wallace Collection<sup>1</sup> restaurant, to reflect on Michael's recent 80th birthday and on all his years as an oboist and working with oboists. It turned out that he and Hilary had arrived back from Singapore the night before having also attended the IDRS conference in Bangkok, and this on the end of a highly busy year of work in London and around the world. There was no sign of tiredness and our conversation, inspired by the paintings of Boucher and Fragonard that we had passed on our way in, was nicely aided by lunch.

Knowing that DRN has already captured Michael's long career in music<sup>2</sup>, I was keen to build on this by asking him about his thoughts on the oboe, its development today and all the great music that has been written for it. Michael is very proud to have been so closely involved with the

development of the Howarth range of instruments over the years – the only company that makes a full range of models from beginner to professional – and feels that the high quality achieved has helped contribute to an overall improvement in all makes of oboe.

Of course, Michael adds that although good oboes make life easier for players, where would we be without a good oboe reed? 'The developments have been extraordinary. When we think back to the 1960s when Harry Baker was a director of Howarth and tying on reeds using his simple "spinning machine", the materials and the methods were rudimentary compared with now.' In the 60s when gouging machines became available, Michael bought his first machine from Michael Winfield's father, a former Rolls Royce engineer. Later he acquired a Kunibert Michel, a machine that many of us oboists bought from 1970 onwards. Then in the late 70s the profile machines became available; Michael drove to Germany to purchase a Michel profiler with a Lothar Koch template and, shortly after, a Rieger which he later sold to Peter Wiggins. Peter was, Michael thinks, the first full-time reed maker in the UK after Harry Baker and he was always looking for improvements. Since his early days in the 1970s, countless other reed makers have emerged and made innovations.

For Michael, some of the most remarkable innovations in the mass market have been through Ke-Xun Ge who has developed an

international reed-making and associated products business. Ke-Xun was granted a scholarship to study the oboe in London at the Guildhall and, like most students, was short of funds. But he was a good reed maker. Anthony Camden brought him into Howarth and Michael provided him with 100 pieces of cane and staples to see what he could achieve. In the space of two days these came back as perfectly straight and fine reeds that sold out in hours! Over the years Michael discussed many ideas with Ke-Xun and so helped in the launch of the phenomenon of KG Reeds.

Michael is positive and hopeful on the subject of synthetic reeds. There are fibre reeds that are becoming more reliable and sensitive to the player. It is only a matter of time, he thinks, before these will be used regularly by some players in place of the cane reed, particularly doublers, for practising and for some actual performing.

Michael is still in touch with Ke-Xun who is working on the production of improved synthetic fibre reeds. The latest KG models that Michael tested at IDRS Bangkok were definitely improvements on earlier synthetic reeds, especially the cor anglais reeds.

Michael has been a lifelong follower of orchestras and

orchestral playing. During his years at Howarth, he had the chance to attend countless concerts in the UK and abroad, and to enjoy and compare the different traditions and approaches of orchestras and their individual players: the British orchestras of course, but also American orchestras and those from across Europe

Since his early days in the 1970s, countless other reed makers have emerged and made innovations



and further afield. Conductors have also been an interest for Michael and on this occasion the early recordings of Fritz Reiner were cited giving rise to an extended discussion on the great Carlos Kleiber and the influence on him of his father, Erich.

Michael's particular interest in the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra enables him to speak with authority on the different periods over the past sixty years, from Karajan in the 1960s and 1970s to Simon Rattle, and now Kirill Petrenko. Always producing highly distinctive and original performances, he has noticed how the orchestra has become more and more refined over the years. As an example, he cited Herbert Blomstedt's concert (Beethoven 3 and Schubert 3) that he recently attended in Berlin as an example. Our conversation fondly remembered the great playing of Lothar Koch in the days of Karajan and then the era of Hansjörg Schellenberger, whilst agreeing that today's oboists, Albrecht Mayer and Jonathan Kelly, Christoph Hartmann, Andreas Wittmann with Dominik Wollenweber on cor anglais are truly extraordinary.

In thinking about British orchestras, Michael was quick to mention memorable players such as Derek Wickens (RPO and Royal Opera House): the power of his playing but also the delicacy of his articulation, and his ability to turn a phrase so magically. 'What has changed over the years?' I asked, and Michael pointed to the fullness of sound now produced, the exceptional technical accomplishment, and the wonderful ability to produce blended playing within our wind sections. 'In the past many leading players began in orchestras outside London and later came to the capital; now, many stay where they began for economic reasons, making our provincial orchestras ever-stronger and giving London orchestras a challenge to attract the most experienced players.'

In Michael's time at Howarth, the 'three tenors of the oboe' (Roy Carter, Gordon Hunt and David Theodore) came in for special mention for possessing highly distinctive voices on the oboe whilst representing what UK players are capable of doing. Our discussion also took in American oboists. Michael recalled his times with Philadelphia's Richard Woodhams and being shown the great Marcel Tabuteau's teaching room at the Curtis Institute. Ray Still of Chicago and Joseph Robinson of the New York



Michael Britton receiving Honorary Membership of IDRS in Granada 2018

Philharmonic came in for special mention as well as John de Lancie whom Michael remembers praising the English oboe thumb plate system. Today, Michael has many special friendships with American oboists, not least with Elaine Douvas of the Metropolitan Opera who visited London earlier this year, and who has recorded with our own Emily Pailthorpe.

Overall, the distinctive sound of traditional British oboe playing of former years and the tone and flexibility that went with it was a theme that Michael kept returning to. This sound, he thought, had to do with the instrument but particularly the reeds. Many British players have retained this elegance of sound and they tend to play on much lighter reeds than in Europe. Trying European players' reeds over the years, Michael has often found he could not produce a sound, and yet players play so beautifully on them! He seldom had this problem with British players' reeds. There seems to be an idea that you cannot

produce a big sound with a lighter reed, he says. And yet even in a modern concert hall he has never found British players' sounds not carrying to the back of the hall.

Whilst showing natural loyalty to Howarth, Michael's knowledge and respect for other oboe makers is apparent when he talks about how the instrument is evolving: we spoke of Lorée, Marigaux, Rigoutat, Kreul (his first instrument), Püchner and many more. The use of modern computer-aided equipment has helped produce a consistent quality of instrument and he talks with pride of what is being achieved by instrument designers and makers, whilst also revelling in the work of the players whose musical needs drive this process.

I was interested to hear about performances that stand out for Michael over time. He said he hardly knew where to start! Having attended about 40 IDRS conferences and many smaller double reed

Photo: Graham Salter



conventions where the only competition is the bassoon, he has heard a particularly wide range of concertos and recitals. He also has a very large collection of CDs, many of which have been given to him by the players themselves and are not always available on other media. Some outstanding performances he recalls are Alex Klein's first recital after overcoming his focal dystonia, where he played Bach organ works that he had arranged, Chris Blake's *Temporal Variations* (Britten arr. Colin Matthews with string orchestra) putting a new light on the work, the Zelenka sonatas with Holliger and Bourgue, Katherine Needleman's *Six Etudes* by Silvestrini from memory at the IDRS Conference in Granada, David Theodore's Vaughan Williams *Concerto* recording which perfectly exemplifies the work in Michael's eyes, Thomas Hutchinson playing the Berio *Sequenza* from memory at the ARD competition in Munich, many concerts at the Wigmore with Nick Daniel playing yet another new work written for him, a performance of the Strauss *Concerto* by Gordon Hunt (Michael can't remember where but which Gordon told him afterwards was the 67th time he had performed it!). In addition, his hero, Lothar Koch, not in a concert but in a masterclass over three days in Stockholm when, without once picking up the oboe, he brilliantly demonstrated on the piano his ideas on oboe playing and teaching skills. And another wonderful masterclass in Paris with Jacques Tys and David Walter together for a day, which worked brilliantly, much to Michael's surprise.

This brought us to the subject of masterclasses. Michael commented that the young students of today have so many more opportunities than in the past to hear and learn from great teachers and players round the world. Masterclasses have become so much more common in the music colleges and at all the conferences; and one of the few advantages of Covid was the amazing growth of online recitals, classes and lectures. Michael is surprisingly up-to-date with all these things and is most grateful to all those who posted such interesting content during lockdown. He says it helped keep him going!

Another interesting area we spoke about was the growth and development of oboe



Michael and Hilary

competitions. Michael has attended most of the Barbirolli competitions since inception, IDRS Gillet competitions and, more recently, the renowned ARD Competition in Munich. He is now planning to go to the Sony competition in Japan this October. He tells me that 280 players applied from 28 countries; though he is relieved he will only be listening to the second-round players, not all 231!

Michael and Hilary find competitions an interesting way to listen to up-and-coming players from around the world including the development of Asian oboe players now reflected in the number of applicants for the Sony Competition. Howarth were very pleased this year to sponsor Inoke Isoke from Japan at IDRS in Bangkok. To keep the English connection, she played, to great acclaim, Nicola LeFanu and the Rawsthorne *Concerto*, a work which Michael feels should be played more.

Michael says that it has been most interesting to watch the development of

several players that he first heard at the Barbirolli competition: Lin Chin went on to win at the IDRS and is now a professor in Leipzig, Berlin. Sergio Sanchez also went on to win IDRS and has just been appointed Professor of Oboe in Lübeck, Matthieu Petitjean is now Principal Oboe in Monte Carlo, and of course our own

Steve Hudson, Ruth Bolister and many others have gone on to good orchestral or teaching positions round the world.

Typical of their wide-ranging thoughts, it was good to hear both Michael and Hilary talking about instruments for junior players and how more needs to be done to bring young people in to playing. The fact that there are lightweight instruments being produced at a reasonable price is another credit to instrument makers including Howarth who have been innovative in this respect. Hilary said it was good to hear Catherine Millar speaking at IDRS Bangkok about her experiences in teaching mini bassoon to children from the age of six and how well they transition to full-size instruments.

Together, Michael and Hilary are remarkable supporters and friends of oboists and the instruments that they play. Having met in their youth orchestra in Sunderland, they have over many years contributed in so many ways to the world of oboe playing and not least in supporting many young players who have needed help on their journeys into playing. Talking to them both on this particular July day, it was a pleasure to savour so many aspects of the world of the oboe and oboists.

#### Endnotes:

1. Wallace Collection, Marylebone, London
2. DRN120 (Summer 2018)



# My Heckel, My Life

Julian Roberts

Julian considers how much we should consider 'improving' our instruments.



When I moved onto a 1925 Heckel bassoon (from a Fox) after two years in full-time principal bassoon work, I found that my reeds were completely unsuitable. They seemed at once both too soft and too hard, too flat and too sharp, too quiet and too loud, and they didn't work particularly well at either the top or the bottom! The journey from there (1979) has been a long one, so what, briefly, have I learned? It is difficult disentangling the elements that combine to give the end result as one affects the other so much, but of course they are: instrument, crook, reed.

It's important to say that my bassoon, and its later replacement with a better very similar one of the same year, is totally unlike any modern bassoon. Not having played a modern one since 1979 I just don't know for sure how much the account below may have to offer. I do think, however, that there is plenty likely to be relevant to everyone, not least baroque bassoon players, and to anyone with older Heckels.

The instrument is of course the given, the fixed element in the situation, but over the

years I've tried all sorts of things to attempt to improve it. The amount each key can open is one of the most crucial factors in how the instrument plays and, unlike most of the other ones, is adjustable. My conclusion is that having the normally open keys (e.g. the low F/G key) as open as possible gives you the greatest flexibility in sound and intonation, and is worth the downside of slightly less finger virtuosity. (For optimal virtuosity keys are normally regulated to be as open as necessary, but not more, in order to reduce the amount of finger movement to a minimum; apparently a typical formula is one third of the radius of the tone hole.)

*At every moment we  
have to think:  
'How can I make this fit  
in, and sound right?'*

In a previous article (printed in DRN116) I explained why every note has to be flexible – able to be played at slightly different pitches (so slight that the difference could be described as a change in timbre rather than one in pitch). In brief, that article showed why in the major scale every note, other than the key note, may need to be played slightly sharp or flat to what the tuning machine demands. In the key of C: D slightly sharp, E slightly flat, F and G almost exactly in tune, but F a hair flat, and G a hair sharp, A slightly flat and B slightly flat. Because these relationships apply to every scale, it means that every note on the instrument needs to be able to be bent flat and sharp. For example, a D in C major may need to be slightly sharp – requiring some effort on the tenor D if you use the simple fingering. But in B $\flat$  major it might sound nice slightly flat, so that's good news on that note with that fingering. In F major,

a slightly sharp G above open F really will quite often sound rather nice, but in E $\flat$  major it may not. And so on.

The article explained why this is the case, which is in the physical property of the sound itself of a single note. What I take from this is an explanation of what most of us sense, that playing even individual notes in tune is about something more than getting them exactly as on a tuning machine, or piano. We can do slightly better. Just as we don't think that the final interpretation of a piece of music is to play it exactly in time with a metronome. This flexibility is partly what's going on in an orchestra, where the amount of piano-like fixed notes are very few: the piano (where it is scored), celeste, glockenspiel, xylophone and crucially the harp. And of course the open strings which are rarely used except bottom C on cellos and violas and G on violins.

The flexibility of pitch and timbre in melodic playing is a nice-to-have, but is essential when playing inside the harmony of the orchestra. At every moment we have to think: 'How can I make this fit in, and sound right?' While it's possible to change the pitch of notes by using extra keys, though this also changes the timbre, I am talking about something more subtle. I want to be able to make such minute adjustments within a millisecond, without thinking; completely naturally, as if I was singing, and without a change of timbre. It is for this sense of freedom of expression that I find that having the keys as open as possible helps.

When talking about having the keys as open as possible, what do I mean? If you look at them, you can see their height is governed by small pieces of cork or felt which is glued onto the metal. This is primarily to stop them rattling against each other and the wood. Often an

unnecessarily thick piece (say, 1mm thick) is used. It can be replaced by a thinner one, say half a millimetre thickness. So I'm mostly talking about a difference of about half a millimetre. Thus where the sound comes out of the tone hole, there is as little impediment as possible.

It's not rocket science to pull off the old piece and glue a new bit on with proper Evo-Stik (though try not to damage the metal plating with the knife if you have to use one to cut off the old bit of cork/felt). Don't change the bits that ensure keys work together properly! The long joint heights are governed together and all are adjusted simultaneously in the way I mean by just one piece of cork under the B key lever.

At the extreme, keys that are as open as possible may give a slightly louder minimum dynamic; but I have certainly found, on my bassoon at least, that keys as open as possible give a greater maximum dynamic. Of course my perspective, deservedly or not, is as a principal player. A second player may feel that ultimate softness is more important. But I would say that while any note can be muted, you can't arrange for the keys to open up for a particular passage. The maximum flexibility of sound and intonation is a more important consideration in both roles.

Now your obvious rejoinder could be: 'I open a key up and the note is sharper'. This is where I come to an important point. I have tried so many things that seem to make a certain effect, but after a few months that no longer applies and I am either in the same position as before, or an equal and sometimes opposite problem has surfaced. It is too tedious to go into details of what can happen and I've erased most of them from my mind, but this most recent one is typical. The instrument was serviced and, giving it a quick blow before taking it away, I was delighted that the tenor F seemed brighter, as it's a note I have to support a lot. On getting home I realised that the E, E $\flat$  and Gs, were flatter than before. The new felt governing the F/G key height was much thicker. The interval between E and F had widened, so it wasn't that the F was sharper, but the E that was flatter, which I did not need. This is a very simple example. You might have chosen to have the flatter Gs, E and E $\flat$ , but there are other consequences of that option. For example, if the low G is slightly flatter, the low F will seem slightly sharper in relationship, something few of us want. More pertinently, with that F/G key lower

I think the whole instrument will resonate rather more darkly as the low G is in a way the fundamental of the scale, and I think that all the intonation is based from that note.

To return to the main point, after at least six months any change is settling down, and if I'd solved one problem I'd have probably got another which seemed at least as important as the one I thought I'd solved. Often my objective had been to stabilise the C# below open F. Lowering the G and F keys was supposedly helpful, but I found that the benefit was short lived. It stabilised the reed I was using at the time, but the next reeds to a dwindling extent.

By opening all the keys up, I include those on the long joint and bell. This has a huge effect on the sound, response, everything – but is very subtle and takes ages to become fully manifest. What happened is that, over time, my way of blowing and reed-making (with the keys as open as possible) subtly changed so that instead of the pitch being sharper, the sound was fuller and more resonant.

The relative intonation and response between each note changes throughout the instrument when any key heights are

devastating to the point of feeling unable to play professionally. I'd rather put up with the possible slight pad leaks (which from bitter experience I've learned never to attempt to adjust) than have to start learning to blow the thing all over again. Obviously a player may sometimes want something done that is not good if left unattended, and it's quite right when the instrument expert lays down the law.

All the above applies in spades to the cork gasket. While the cork might break and need to be renewed, changing its thickness has an even more profound effect than the above, and is like a heart transplant. Many people think that a thicker gasket will make the low notes flatter and cure their sharp bottom register. The thickness can vary as much as 5mm or even more between different players' instruments (which means a 10mm effect on the tube length). But I would contend that a flatter low register won't be the real effect. What will mostly change is the tuning of low G and A $\flat$ , meaning the lowest notes will tend to be sharper in relation to these fundamental notes of the scale. The whole instrument will change, not just the low notes. Upon my enquiring, Heckel responded saying they have a specific gasket dimension, I recall it being 2mm but have lost the letter.

*'They will complain by occasionally making you do beginner-type things like squawking, or sagging on a particular note, and all sorts of other stropky behaviour.'*

changed. The important thing I've realised, having found out what works best, is to leave the instrument alone, which is obviously oxymoronic, an impossible dichotomy. For 15 years I changed nothing and only by this means felt totally at home on the instrument.

Unfortunately, it's difficult to persuade our excellent instrument technicians that I know how the instrument's key heights should be regulated. What matters more in maintenance, and (to be fair) to many people, is the minimum movement referred to earlier, and reducing key noise, for which the optimum thickness of cork or felt is needed, as it will wear down in use. This will of course be true if one primarily wants virtuosity and plays the instrument with a heavy finger touch. Being so out on a limb in what I want, I don't take my instrument to be repaired any more. Changes of key heights I now find

Worst of all is to fiddle with the bore. On old instruments the wood slightly pulls in where it gets wet at the U-bend, even if it is kept dry and in good condition when not being played. In 1995 I suspected the wood was slightly pulled in relative to the brass end holes, and minutely sandpapered it. For the next year playing was a nightmare. The renowned Hugh Cooper had told me earlier never to be tempted to fiddle with the bore at this area, as it accounted for the 'bloom' on the sound. So I realised he was right. I think in time that bloom returns, though by time I mean at least a couple of years.

Both Heckel bassoons I've owned, and all others that I've looked at (till a recent trend), don't have the highly polished wood in the bore that many other makes and new instruments have. Rather, there is a slight roughness. In a recent conversation I was told the bore should be polished



completely smooth, but I'm very dubious that this is something that should be done to a fine old instrument, for the same reasons as above.

All the above applies, of course, to the individual holes. Tamper with anything and something unrelated to that note will be affected. Guess how I know! If you don't like the instrument, get another one, or get used to it. A beautiful old instrument that plays well shouldn't be 'upgraded', fitted with modern fancy metal tone hole inserts, nor in my opinion given a modern lacquer or varnish. They play totally differently to modern instruments and people shouldn't take their modern mindset and impose it on something from the past. Fitting lots of fancy keys is undesirable and mostly unnecessary. If you want to play to high Z get a modern instrument. The only change that is OK, if you must, is the temporary one where tape, blue tack, or wax is added to holes.

The older the instrument is, the more sensitive it is to changes, and the more likely it is to become unstable, at least temporarily, if any changes are made. They are like fussy old people who don't like change!

Instruments, even old ones, gradually change as they are blown. It is a mysterious process, what we call 'blowing in'. I think that the atoms are gradually learning to dance in a different way. On a new instrument it is relatively easy to train the atoms to dance as you want them to, but on an old one you may have to re-train them to dance in a minutely different way; and this is more difficult as they don't want to! They will complain by occasionally making you do beginner-type things like squawking, or sagging on a particular note, and all sorts of other stropy behaviour.

Whether the instrument changes, or one becomes better at playing it, is unknowable: except that an instrument that has been played well, plays well in someone else's hands as well – at first at least. Always play it properly and never just blast in those ff sections of orchestral music where you can't hear yourself; and preferably don't make the stupid forced or hard effects requested by some conductors!

## Crooks

We can't change anything on one particular crook, but there is a huge variety of makes and types to try. I have found

that trying lots of them for all their different claimed characteristics is like chasing the wind or a dog chasing its tail; you go round in circles and, until you settle down on one, you don't quite know what you're doing. Most claimed advantages will be cancelled out by a disadvantage elsewhere. A high-note crook won't be much good at the bottom; a lighter, brighter crook may be more difficult to play quietly.



The biggest factor is getting used to one crook and blowing it in. Like instruments, they do change with consistent blowing. Particularly the tenor register gradually becomes less resistant, and at the same time the low register can become deeper, and top notes more reachable. Crooks, and instruments, seem to 'stretch' in a manner of speaking. The pre-WW2 Heckel crooks had a mystique to them – reputedly the metal was different – but by now it is difficult to find one that is in good condition. I used one for many years and when it split for the umpteenth time and was said to be no longer repairable I thought I was finished. But now, after eight years, I feel just as comfortable on the new one that I changed to. Frankly I wonder whether their quality was simply that they'd been played a lot. The C-bore Heckel crook is the one designed for the instrument, whether that is a CC, CD, VCD, etc, and will make the intonation of the basic scale low F to open F likely to work the best. For my first few years on a Heckel I made the mistake of continuing to use my Fox crook because it was easier to blow;

but it had a flat C and open F, problems that were only resolved on a Heckel crook. Just as the crook is getting really nice (or is it that one's finally mastered it?), the seam can split. When it is repaired it will not be the same and will require the same blowing-in process all over again, though it won't take so long. Some people say that the crook only starts to give its best when it has had to be repaired: others that it is at its best just before it breaks! Bending the crook to a different shape can have that effect for a month or longer, too. It is very likely to cause the seam to break so should be avoided if possible.

## Pitch

The pitch of the instrument is mostly determined by the player's way of blowing and the reed. Relatively minute adjustment can be made with a longer or shorter crook. But I have found it's the pitch level change with temperature that is the most significant factor. Heckel bassoons are designed to play at their specified pitch at 20°C on a length 1 Heckel crook. This is warmer than the average impecunious student or musician's practice room in the UK winter, all the more now that energy prices are rocketing. The temperature of the room or hall has much more influence on the pitch than anything else. At say 18°C the room is quite warm but pitch is likely still to be appreciably flat. It is important not to learn to habitually force-blow the instrument up to pitch at that temperature. It won't be a proper sound and will be sharp in the concert hall and normal orchestral rehearsal situation. What matters when practising is playing the instrument in tune with itself (no easy task), having got a set-up you know is at the right pitch at a proper temperature.

According to their literature, Heckel say that a 1 degree Celcius change of temperature gives a 0.87Hz change of pitch; at 15°C pitch will be 435, at 25°C it will be just under 445, assuming the bassoon is tuned to 440 with a length 1 crook, as has normally been the case since around 1939.

We can't really know at what pitch orchestras used to play when bassoons like mine were made. Heckel told me mine was made to 437.5. I believe this was a time when pitch was changing from 435 to 440. The latter was apparently generally agreed around 1938.

**Next time – Reeds!**

# Music from the Baltics

Andrea Ridilla

Andrea reports from the College Music Society 2023 International Conference in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

One of the most fulfilling aspects for me as a professional musician is the thrill of exploring new cultures and meeting people whose lives are different from our own. After all, aren't people the best part of life? My eyes have been opened – and my playing has evolved – from exposure to international styles, pedagogy and new techniques that I have learned through being a member of the British Double Reed Society, the International Double Reed Society and the Australasian Double Reed Society. The deep friendships I have forged through these organisations have enabled me to continue to learn long after their conferences are over. Beginning a new academic year with fresh perspectives from around the globe is a gift both to me and to my students.

This summer, I attended the 2023 College Music Society (CMS) International Conference from 1st to 11th July in the Baltics: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

The conference was enriching on many levels and I wholeheartedly recommend this society to anyone who may be interested in researching new music, learning from other performers and scholars, and total immersion into new cultures. The CMS international conferences focus not only on music but also the history, architecture, food and culture of each location. Participants meet and interact with national contemporary composers, scholars and performing musicians.

Along with presentations of lecture-recitals, papers and panels, the CMS conferences – held every two years in a country other than the United States or Canada – focus on the music and culture of the country visited. Unique performances and connections to the local musicians and scholars, fun and interactive events, and wonderful food are also a big part, which allows participants to integrate themselves



*Latvia song contest*

into the culture that they are also studying. There is time built in to speak the language, visit the cities and their bookstores.

The first CMS International Conference was in 1995 in Berlin, Germany, and the 2025 conference will be held in Bogota, Columbia.

The fun begins a year before the conference when the submissions open. Invitations to present are competitive and are reviewed by a juried panel. I was contacted by Professor of Flute, Dr. Nicole Molumby from Boise State University in Idaho and Dr. Siok Lian Tan, Professor of Piano at Miami University to work on a collaborative project for the conference. I was able to get leads into some excellent Baltic oboe music from Philip Nodel, Professor of Oboe at the Tchaikovsky Moscow Conservatory of Music, and Dennis Osver, an excellent oboist and pedagogue in Moscow who has recorded music of Estonian composer Eino Tamberg. Nicole, Lian and I were accepted to perform mid-twentieth-century music of three Estonian composers.

The Baltic States gained their independence from the Soviet Union on 6th September 1991 and, by August 1994, all Russian troops had withdrawn. Each country has its own unique culture but what struck me was how they all treasure



*Hill of Crosses, pilgrimage site in northern Lithuania*





View of Vilnius from Gediminias Hill, Old Town

their freedom with extreme gratefulness. They espouse their generational traditions and are determined to pass them onto their children. You can feel the warmth and spirit of the people the moment you step on the ground.

First stop Vilnius, Lithuania: a city that combines the charm of its Old Town with the modern new city across the River Neris. Lithuania is a Catholic country with many pilgrimage sites. The faithful come to Vilnius to see the Shrine of the Divine Mercy with its famous painting of the image of the mercy of God.

There is also an independent republic in the middle of the city, The Republic of Užupis, with 7,000 inhabitants, its own constitution, a volunteer government and its own currency.<sup>1</sup> Užupis, meaning 'beyond the river,' is a charming artist colony and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.<sup>2</sup> Some people compare the artist colony of Užupis to the Montmartre neighbourhood of Paris. The conference programme was hosted by musicians of Vilnius at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre.

Incidentally, the food in all three states is wonderful. You can find the best wholegrain bread in the world in the Baltics!

Next stop: Riga, Latvia is known for its Art Nouveau architecture, charming Old Town and the Latvian Maritime Academy. Gorgeous parks span the city. During our visit, the 27th Latvian National Song and Dance Festival took place throughout the city. It is held every five years and there are

street fairs, parades, displays and performances. It is one of the largest choral and dancing festivals in the world with over 40,000 participants and has been on the UNESCO Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity list since 2008. The CMS events were held at the Jazeps Vitols Academy of Music in the Old Town.

Entering Estonia: we first toured the Jaanihanso Siidrivabrik organic cider mill. The owner, Alvar, enrolled in a cider course in Gloucestershire, and later worked in the Somerset Cider Brand Company at Burrow Hill to master the process.<sup>3</sup>



You can't beat the bread in the Baltics

My favourite part of the conference was a two-day sojourn at Laulasmaa on Lahepere Bay, part of the Gulf of Finland. It is home to Estonia's cherished composer, Arvo Pärt (b.1935) and the recently opened Arvo Pärt Centre. Set in a pristine rural forest setting near the sea, Laulasmaa, meaning 'Song Land,' was the former retreat village of Soviet composers.

We became acquainted with Pärt's life, music and his compositional style. He

studied with Heino Eller at the Tallin State Conservatory. Much of his music is in a minimalist style that employs tintinnabuli, a compositional technique that Pärt invented. His music is partly inspired by Gregorian chant. Earlier in his life he experienced a dramatic religious conversion to Orthodox Christianity. He studied Gregorian chant and classic vocal polyphony at the Notre Dame School.<sup>4</sup>

His pieces for double reeds include:

- *Collage sur B-A-C-H*, for oboe, string orchestra, harpsichord, and piano (1964)
- *In spe* for wind quintet and string orchestra (2010)
- *Quintettino*, Op. 13, for wind quintet (1964)
- *Collage über B-A-C-H* for oboe and strings (1964)
- *Fratres* (1977–1992)
  - *Fratres* for string quintet or wind quintet (original version)
  - *Fratres* for wind octet and percussion
  - *Fratres* for chamber ensemble
- *Spiegel im Spiegel* (1978–2011)
  - for alto flute, oboe or cor anglais and piano (2007)

*Spiegel im Spiegel* (mirror(s) in the mirror) is written in Pärt's tintinnabular style. A lovely melodic voice sings over diatonic scales and tintinnabular voice, operating within a triad on the tonic playing simultaneously. It is a great piece to complement an oboe recital.

Last stop Tallinn: This capital city of Estonia is on the Baltic Sea, with its well-preserved medieval Old Town. It was the site of our concert: 'Mid-Twentieth-Century Estonian Flute and Oboe Chamber Music' presented in the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre in their new state-of-the art facility. This was the programme:

- Mati Kuulberg (1947–2001): *Sonatiin* (1976) for two flutes (arr. flute and oboe)
  - II. Tempo di marcia tambre
  - III. Vivo
- Eino Tamberg (1930–2010): *Muusikat Oboele*, Op.35 for Oboe and Piano (1970)
  - IV. Äaria
  - V. Sonatün

Heino Eller (1887–1970): *Kolm pala* (Three Pieces) for Flute and Piano (1951)

- I. Im Tal (In the Valley)
- II. Jõel (On the River)
- III. Aasal (On the Meadow)

Mati Kuulberg (1947–2001) was the only Soviet era baby boomer on our programme. Although he wrote in traditional musical forms, he used motivic repetition, octave displacement and modal fragments to create rich textures. *Sonatiin*, originally written for two flutes, was arranged by the performers for flute and oboe. Estonian, Setu and Lappish folk music can be heard in this work. Below are some of his other works that include double reeds:

*Three Pals [Kolm semu]* (1992) for flute, oboe, clarinet

Trio No. 1 (1982) for flute, bassoon, piano

*Four Sonatas on the Theme BACH [Neli sonaati teemal BACH]* (1984)

Sonata No. 1 – Moderato (in B flat Major)  
Sonata No. 2 – Animato (in A minor)  
Sonata No. 3 – Allegro (in C Major)  
Sonata No. 4 – Grave (in B minor)  
for flute, oboe, alto saxophone, tuba

*Partita [Partiita]* (1969) for flute, oboe, alto saxophone, tuba

*Wind Quintet [Puhkpillikvintett]* (1972) dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the Jaan Tamm Wind Quintet

*Music for the 1980 Dance Festival* (1979)

1. Moderato (Interlude)
2. Allegretto (Children's Dance Suite) (Raksi-Jaak)
3. Poco meno mosso (Shoemaker's Polka A)
4. Estonian Folk Dance 'Kaera-Jaan'
5. Poco meno mosso (Shoemaker's Polka B)
6. Moderato allegretto (Haymaking) for wind quintet, percussion



Special vintage cider

*Piano Sextet [Klaverisekstett]* (1974) for piano, wind quintet

*Estonian Dances [Eesti tantsud]* (1970) for violin, cello, flute, oboe, clarinet (saxophone), tuba

*Concerto per fiati* (1976) for piccolo, flute, alto flute, oboe, cor anglais, clarinet in E $\flat$ , clarinet in B $\flat$ , bass clarinet, bassoon, contrabassoon, 2 horns

For more information see the website of the Estonian Music Information Centre: ([www.emic.ee](http://www.emic.ee))

## Notes on the Composers

**Eino Tamberg** (1930–2010)

Born in Tallin, was Director of Composition at the Estonian Academy of Music. Resounding with the beauty and pain of being human, and with love as the all-pervading theme, his virtuosic *Muusikat Oboele*, Op.35 breathes twentieth-century harmonies into classical forms. The work opens with a *Dialog* for oboe solo, followed by four movements in duo with piano: *Prelüüd*, *Rondo*, *Äaria* and *Sonatün*.

His *Concerto for Bassoon and Symphony Orchestra*, Op.108 (2000) is well-known; in four movements and is ripe for recording! ([www.emic.ee](http://www.emic.ee))

The music for Tamberg's *Muusikat Oboele* (*Music for Oboe*) – which I highly recommend – and another bassoon piece (Grade 5): *Konzert*, Op. 42 for *Bassoon and Piano*, can be purchased at Editions Marc Reift: Route du Golf 150 - CH-3963 Crans-Montana (Switzerland);, email: [info@reift.ch](mailto:info@reift.ch) Bassoonists may also be interested in Tamberg's *Concerto Grosso* for flute, clarinet, trumpet, alto saxophone, bassoon and piano with percussion, harp and strings, Op.5.

**Heino Eller** (1887–1970)

Was born in Tartu in eastern Estonia and is considered the most influential twentieth-century Estonian composer. From 1940 to his death, Eller was Professor of Composition at the Tallinn Conservatory where he founded the Tartu School of composition. His works between 1940 and 1970 met the expectations of Soviet cultural policy in which folk melodies are presented within Classical and Romantic structures and harmonies. He was married to the Jewish pianist, Anna Kremer who was executed at a Nazi concentration camp in 1942. A member of the Estonian Composers' Union from 1944 until his death, he is remembered also for being the professor of Arvo Pärt.<sup>5</sup>

The College Music Society is open to music professionals all over the world. To join visit the website: [www.music.org](http://www.music.org)

## Endnotes:

1. Tom Taylor, 'Užupis, the Lithuanian republic that replaced a Lenin statue with Frank Zappa,' Far Out, 10th September 2021, ©2023 Far Out Magazine, accessed 27th August 2023. [www.faroutmagazine.co.uk/lithuanian-republic-replaced-lenin-statue-with-frank-zappa/](http://www.faroutmagazine.co.uk/lithuanian-republic-replaced-lenin-statue-with-frank-zappa/).
2. Republic of Užupis, independent since 1st of April 1998, accessed 26th August 2023. [ww.uzupiorespublika.com/en/home/](http://www.uzupiorespublika.com/en/home/).
3. About Us, Jaanihanso, © 2023 Jaanihanso, accessed 27th August 2023. [www.jaanihanso.ee/about-us/](http://www.jaanihanso.ee/about-us/).
4. Arvo Pärt Biography, Arvo Pärt Centre, accessed 26th August 2023. [www.arvopart.ee/en/](http://www.arvopart.ee/en/).
5. Dr. Nicole Molunby and Andrea Ridilla, Programme Notes, Programme Booklet: The College Music Society 2023 International Conference, July 2023.



# British Bassoonists 1900 to 1950

Meyrick Alexander

The Waterhouse Open Day is one of the highlights of the bassoon enthusiast's calendar where we examine the late Bill Waterhouse's collection of instruments – probably the finest in the world – and his manuscripts, books and other treasures. Like-minded individuals gather in an idyllic rural situation, listen to various speakers and enjoy the company of the Waterhouse family.

This year I was pleased to be asked to be one of the speakers. Here is a précis of my talk plus a reference to my series of articles, published in *Double Reed News* numbers 27 to 31 (1994 to 1995), soon to be available online, where I listed the principal woodwind players of twentieth-century British orchestras. I will be working on complete bassoon sections to add to this. Before 1995, if you heard an orchestra, you could be certain that the permanent members would be playing, whereas now there could be anybody from a large pool of fine players; so bringing this list up to date is not feasible. My talk contained a large number of portraits, kindly projected by Jim Klopp.

I grew up in a household without a television and so evenings were spent in the company of the BBC Third Programme, now Radio 3, and a large collection of 78RPM and LP records. I soon realised that not all woodwind players sounded the same and was keen to find out who these various players were. So I started to make personnel lists from the *Radio Times* and concert

programmes. Soon I began to recognise the distinctive sounds of BBC bassoonists: Arthur Thornton of the Northern, Barry Morris of the Scottish, George Tofield of the Welsh, Geoffrey Gambold (later to become my teacher) and William Waterhouse both of the BBC Symphony.



Cecil James

Most of my parents' LP collection featured the Philharmonia Orchestra. This was formed in 1946 at the birth of the LP specifically to record the entire repertoire for this new medium, and was nearly disbanded in 1964 when it was considered that the task was complete. So the playing of Gareth Morris (flute), Sidney Sutcliffe (oboe), Bernard Walton (clarinet) and Cecil James (bassoon) became, and remain, very familiar.

As a teacher, I am surprised that very few students are interested in the history of their instrument, especially the playing styles and influences thereof, but that hasn't changed my view of their importance. Geoffrey Gambold explained to me that, on entering a studio or concert hall, we must leave our musical taste, our rhythm and our intonation at the door; our individuality is surrendered to become part of something much greater. This is why we wear a uniform as we become part of a football team, an army, a flock of birds or a feeding ball of sardines. As an orchestral player for more than half a century, I recognise – and am



E.F. James

pleased to have been a small part in – a tradition, or a progression. In the various orchestras of which I have been a member,

Meyrick delves into a favourite topic.

I am very aware of those who came before me.

I began my talk with E F (Fred) James, Principal of the Queen's Hall Orchestra and later a founder member and chairman of the LSO. After recording Elgar's *First Symphony* with its challenging bassoon parts, he complained to the composer (who was conducting). Elgar, with first-hand knowledge of the bassoon, apologised and promised to write something 'nice to play' which is why we have the *Romance*. Robert Bourton told me this story and he is very conscious of his own place in the LSO tradition; he has always made a point of playing the *Romance* whenever possible. James was succeeded by his younger brother W F James, father of Cecil James who described his father as 'a fine player, but not as good as Uncle Fred'!

At this point mention must be made of the two systems of bassoon being played in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century. The instrument had been gradually developing since classical times, with acoustical improvements and extra keys until suddenly, in 1835, when many radical inventions were appearing amongst woodwind and brass instruments, Carl Almenröder and Wilhelm Heckel designed a new bassoon from the ground up.

Over the next decades, Germans and Russians embraced this new instrument enthusiastically. So it is this instrument that romantic composers from Germany and Russia had in mind when they wrote their bassoon parts; elsewhere the original system prevailed. This is not the place to go into more detail about the differences between the traditional 'French' and the new 'German' systems in sound or technique, but when I borrowed a pre-Heckel instrument made in Germany by

Greve from the Waterhouse collection to record Schumann with a period instrument orchestra, the sound was distinctly German. So I wonder how much the new invention changed the sound of what was already going on in German or Russian orchestras. In contrast, I am always amused to see period orchestras using French instruments for Stravinsky: he would never have heard one when he wrote the *Rite of Spring* solo in Smolensk, nor the other two Dhiagilev ballets, so obviously written in the German bassoon tradition of Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky.

American orchestras made a habit of importing European woodwind players. Some bassoonists, especially in New York where they had a Russian bassoon section, brought the new German system; others, like Boston, remained resolutely French with Raymond Allard, uncle to Maurice. Sherman Walt, their Principal Bassoon of the 1950s and 60s, although playing a Heckel, sounded very French. (This instrument is now played by Pascal Gallois.)



*Hallé Orchestra with Archie Camden and (probably) Maurice Whittaker*

In Britain, the Hallé Orchestra appointed Hans Richter as chief conductor and – as conductors always do – he wanted a familiar sound in his orchestra and so took against their bassoon section. In their place he appointed Viennese players on their German bassoons and created two scholarships at the Royal Manchester College of Music for students of the German bassoon, to be filled by Archie Camden and Maurice Whittaker. In 1914 these two duly became first and second bassoons of the Hallé Orchestra in what must have been a steep learning curve; they were the first British players of the German system.

The BBC Symphony Orchestra was formed in 1930 with a French system bassoon section boasting Richard Newton from the LSO as Principal, sharing with Ernest Hinchcliffe and Edward Wilson on second.



*Richard Newton and Edward Wilson*



*Simon Kovar (standing at the back)*



*(L-R) Camden, Wilson, Newton, Hinchcliffe*

In that same year, the New York Philharmonic conducted by Arturo Toscanini visited London with their Russian trained bassoon section consisting of Benjamin Cohon and Simon Kovar from Lithuania and Ukraine respectively, whose German bassoons caused a sensation and

the British bassoon world changed forever. Those of us who have toiled through Kovar's *Daily Exercises* are aware of what fine players these two must have been. As a direct result of this visit, the BBC decided to poach Archie Camden and his Adler from the Hallé in 1932, Newton moving to co-Principal and Hinchcliffe to contra, causing John Alexandra of Thomas Beecham's newly formed LPO to buy a Heckel. There is a recording of Serge Koussevitzky conducting Beethoven 5 with Alexandra on his new instrument: apparently he got in a terrible tangle in the solo at the start of the coda of the second movement and had to rush home for his French system. He is playing the latter in the second movement and his Heckel in the rest of the piece, and this change is very audible in the recording available on YouTube. (There is also a Boston SO recording with the same work and conductor.) My first bassoon teacher, Frank Read, averred that Alexandra was



*Benjamin Cohon*



*John Alexandra*





Peter Parry



Joseph Castaldini

the finest British player of those days. The only other British player of the German system at that time was the young second bassoon, Gwydion Holbrooke (later Brooke).

Within a few years, there came the turmoil of WW2 and orchestras were reformed afterwards with a new generation of players, nearly all of whom were by now playing on the German system: the exceptions being Cecil James and Peter Parry, of the newly formed Phiharmonia, Edward Wilson of the newly formed RPO and Joseph Castaldini who can be heard on so many British film soundtracks of the 1950s and 60s. He made a much more pronounced 'French' sound than the other two. Another player deserves a mention, William Greenlees of the BBC Northern. He changed from Heckel to Buffet in 1974 and played until the early 90s.

The aforementioned Frank Read of the BBC West of England Light Orchestra, who was playing

the French system at the start of the war, found himself as a soldier in a Parisian café in 1945. Behind the bar was a bassoon case. On enquiry, it turned out to contain a Mollenhauer left by a retreating German soldier. The bar owner wasn't interested in money but accepted a sack of coffee beans from the NAAFI as payment! Frank played on this for the rest of his career and it is now in the expert hands of Peter Wesley of the BBC Scottish.

Finally, a story of Maurice Whitaker who emigrated to South Africa.



Frank Read

A gala concert was organised with Sir Thomas Beecham and the finest orchestral players in that country. On climbing the podium for the rehearsal, Beecham surveyed the players and his gaze lighted on Whitaker.

'I say, my man, I know you don't I', he said.

'Aye, and I know you an' all', Whitaker replied.

'What are you doing here?', asked Sir Thomas.

'Trying to get away from the likes of thee!', was the reply.

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# Oboe Classics Plus

Jeremy Polmear

Oboe  
classics

Jeremy muses on where founding the Oboe Classics label has taken him.



Jeremy celebrating his 80th birthday above Dolgellau, North Wales

I used to get irritated when, in the middle of a normal conversation, an older person would interrupt with: 'I'm 83, you know.' Except that I find myself doing something similar now that I'm 80. I think it's going from being slightly embarrassed about the grey hair to being rather proud of making it thus far. So I am going to write about my nearly 25 years running Oboe Classics, and be discursive on the way.

Here's another irritant: 'It wasn't like this in the old days.' And it wasn't. At the turn of the century the CD reigned supreme, but now who buys them? Well, a few people, and I keep a supply of physical product for them; but it's now downloads and (especially) streaming. This really is a revolution. If I sell a CD I receive £11.99 even if it is only played once, whereas if someone streams, say, ten Oboe Classics tracks I get about 0.02p, or twice that if I am also the performer.

Not that I am complaining. It's wonderful that people can access almost anything that has been recorded, and it keeps alive performances that in the old days would have been deleted. And just occasionally I hit the jackpot: in 2006 I put up old tracks from Catherine Smith's 'Sheba Sound', and

one of them was streamed about half a million times. It was an arrangement of *Here Comes the Sun* when there was no actual Beatles version because it didn't pay them enough. So people searching on Beatles got, among other things, two oboes, bassoon and harpsichord. It's a lovely arrangement and a fine performance, but goodness knows what the average fan made of it. Then the Beatles relented and the income dried up.

It often seems a bit random which tracks are popular and which are not. I'm surprised and entertained. As John Lennon said: 'Life is what happens while you're making other plans.' I get pleasure promoting Oboe Classics tracks, jackpot or no.

And what a wealth of oboe music there is! One of the plus points of running the label is the discoveries I have made. For example, when Borislav Čičovački came with a proposal for a CD of his Serbian wife Isidora Žebeljan's music, I was dubious. But we went ahead and 'Balkan Bolero' is full of heightened Slavic emotions – aggression, love and dancing – emotions that I relate to particularly now as we currently have two Ukrainians living with us.

**Digression 1:** Since I have basically stopped playing, the Ukrainians were puzzled as to what I did. So I got out my oboe and played the *Swan Lake* solo. They marvelled: and so did I as I can still play it with just the one breath in the middle. Later, Lana (short for Svitlana) was given tickets to a young wind quintet concert and we went together. She asked me: 'Are you famous?' I said: 'Fair-to-middling; maybe you can tell when I introduce myself to the oboist: see how she reacts.' At the end we went back and I said: 'I'm Jeremy Polmear and...' No reaction at all!

The most extreme CD I have put out is Chris Redgate's 'oboe +: Berio and Beyond'. Some of the sheet music is in the booklet,

which you can see on the Oboe Classics website. Wow! The harder the music is the more Chris likes it, and his composers know this. So when you get to the final track – the Berio *Sequenza VII* – it sounds almost classical.

The least extreme album (I don't say CD because in this case there is no physical product) is 'Musical Meze' with me and Diana Ambache. Over the years we have toured in Africa and South East Asia for the British Council, and we needed programmes that would appeal to a wide range of people. We've also done recitals of words and music, where again we needed pieces of immediate appeal. When we stopped touring there was a danger that these performances would be lost, so we set up a couple of days and recorded 18 tracks including *The Watermill* on oboe and *Dido's Lament* on cor. I turned these into simple videos and I've just checked: *Dido* has been watched 18K times, *Watermill* 48K.

I have put out a lot of English music from between the two world wars. I had previously categorised this with the 'cowpat' stereotype until Emily Pailthorpe opened my eyes with a CD that included Britten's *Temporal Variations* of 1936, and her opinion that it was really his first *War Requiem*. I was, and am, moved by her committed performance, even more since she has turned it into a YouTube video with an inspiring collection of illustrations. From other English albums I'd like to mention three pieces: the Bliss *Oboe Quintet* played by George Caird, with its fantastically exciting last movement; Rutland Boughton's *Oboe Quartet No.2* with gorgeous sounds from Mark Baigent; and Arnold Cooke's first *Sonata* of 1957, movingly played by Léon Goossens and Clifton Helliwell. If you check this last one out (and I hope you will, I get .06p for the three movements), you will understand why I credit the pianist also.





Leading from the front in *Les petits nerveux*. L to R: Tony Robb, Jeremy Polmear, Diana Ambache, Phil Gibbon, Sue Dent, Neyire Ashworth

I had always wanted to explore the repertoire that comes from the addition of one other instrument to the oboe/piano duo, and I have done three albums: with bassoon (Phil Gibbon), horn (Steve Stirling) and flute (Tony Robb). In the horn one we included a trio version of Mozart's *Horn Quintet*, with Steve playing the horn part, me playing the violin part (very few changes were needed) and the piano filling in the rest. Horn and oboe toss melodies between them; so there's some lovely new Mozart music to play! Two other composers stand out for me here: first, Madeleine Dring, with her trios with both flute and bassoon. I love her music, it's so playful; always a winner in recitals. And Jean-Michel Damase, who I first came across with his horn trio. We picked him initially because he reminded us of Poulenc, but were rather surprised when, during some concerts prior to the recording, he got longer applause than the other pieces. But it was only when we were listening to the playbacks during the actual recording sessions – normally to check ensemble, intonation etc – that we found ourselves really enjoying his music. So in the flute album we included another trio of his which is, if anything, even better. I love French music, I love its shrug of the shoulders, its refusal to get bogged down in seriousness. This particular trio plays with these concepts, moving effortlessly from one to the other, and ending on an unresolved, beautiful fade-out.

I had long wanted to record the cor anglais *Quatuor* of another French composer, Jean Françaix so I explored his wind music and put together an album. The standout piece, for me, is his *Sixtuor* for wind quintet and bass clarinet. The fast movements are

fun, with wonderful use of the instruments, but I was a bit concerned about the two slow movements: both very quiet, not much seeming to be happening. But when I heard them, oh, they are gorgeous. So next time you are programming *Mladi*, please put this sextet in!

**Digression 2:** That Françaix album included *L'Heure du berger*, another concert winner that he wrote for a fashion show held in a restaurant. The last movement is called *Les petits nerveux*; it starts fast and gets faster. I had listened to some versions by other people that started OK but then settled down, which I knew French musicians never do. There's a famous early recording of the Poulenc *Trio* where the composer/pianist shoots off, not waiting for his wind players. So, taking a leaf out of Poulenc's book, I decided not to wait either, especially on the faster bit. Being good chamber musicians they came along, but if you listen carefully to the recording you can hear the oboe on the front of the beat. I think it works very well, and now that I'm 80 I can say that.

**Digression 2a:** There is a 1949 recording of the last movement of Mozart's *Quintet K.452* where the pianist sets off at what feels like twice the proper speed, with (once again) the wind players struggling to keep up. The final coda is even faster. The pianist's name: Jean Françaix.

It was always an aim of Oboe Classics to give opportunities to many different players, and looking through the catalogue I see that I have put out albums featuring some sixteen individuals and six groups. The individuals are from both the present and the past, and I'd like to mention Janet

Craxton here. She recorded very little, but over the years we've managed to find tapes of some of her many radio broadcasts (and there are more to come). I had lessons with Janet, but I don't think I learned anything directly, I was too nervous; it was from listening to her play that I benefitted. I am going to pick out one piece here: *Driving out the Death* by Elisabeth Lutyens, which Janet broadcast in 1974. Normally I find Lutyens' music too stark; but it's just right for this piece about the coming of Spring, and shares some of the gritty emotions of Stravinsky's version. I once went past my train stop on the tube, so engrossed was I in the story that Janet and her London Oboe Quartet were weaving in my headphones.

**Digression 3:** A forthcoming album has Sarah Roper and her Cuarteto Emispherio playing five newly commissioned pieces. It's lovely that Janet's work in enhancing the repertoire for this lineup is being continued, and these young composers have found a wonderful new range of music and sounds.

And that's been my experience on Oboe Classics; I am always surprised at the things people come up with, things I could never have predicted. Luckily I never had a Master Plan, just followed my nose. A good example of this happened during the 2020 lockdown. George Caird had written an extended dissertation on the Telemann *Fantasias*, and we wanted to turn that into a booklet-plus-CD along the lines of his previous one on the Britten *Metamorphoses*. But how could we illustrate the enormous expressive range of Telemann's music? Someone suggested a competition, and that's what we did; we had absolutely no idea what would turn up from people's bedrooms and kitchens. What we received was a wonderful collection which, thanks also to a brilliant sound engineer and modern technology, we turned it into a lovely album.

And now that I'm 80 and looking for a successor, I'm going to end with a little homily. When I was at Cambridge I met many people who were actively striving towards their goals: David Munrow, Christopher Hogwood, Antony Pay, John Eliot Gardiner, Andrew Davis, David Atherton. And I was all too aware that I didn't have anything that was driving me, apart from a love of music; I was just trying to keep my head above water, going somewhere, I didn't know where. But it turned out all right.

# RBC Final Projects: Three Innovative Enterprises

Archie Auger, Ben Chilton and Rebecca Taylor

Following Head of Wind Jenni Phillips' introduction, in DRN135, to the Final Projects Scheme at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, three selected students elaborate on their ventures.

## Archie Auger: *Learning the Jolivet Concerto for performance with orchestra*



The Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Final Projects offers its students the opportunity to undertake our own long-term project over the course of our fourth year, the subject entirely up to us providing the proposal is convincing. One of the regular features is the Final Projects Orchestra where three students are given the opportunity to perform concertos with it. When I discovered this option, I decided that the Jolivet *Bassoon Concerto* was the perfect choice. I knew that I would be unlikely to have the opportunity to learn that work to this level of detail in my forthcoming career. Lockdown effectively confirmed this decision because I saw this as an opportunity to put in the long and difficult preparation required to learn the concerto. Another part of the final project is to create a report tracking and evaluating my practice process. This has now become an essential resource in my professional career.

I was very grateful to have my bassoon teacher Nikolaj Henriques (Bassoon Section Leader, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra) guide me through the process. We began by making a plan for undertaking this monumental work,

creating a variation of Professor Ole Kristian Dahl's *Drills System*, specific to the patterns and challenges found within the concerto. It became my daily routine. I was also very fortunate to have lessons with Gretha Tuls (Principal Bassoon, Residentie Orkest Den Haag) who helped to analyse the practice process and offer solutions to areas I was struggling with.

In the spring term of 2021, as I was nearing performance stage, I took lessons with Alan Pendlebury who had performed the concerto with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. He offered practical advice on performing the concerto with an orchestra, and advice on how to make the type of reeds that could perform the concerto. RBS held performance classes when I could perform parts of the concerto with piano and receive feedback.

When the time came to rehearse and perform with the orchestra, I met first with our conductor Daniele Rosina to discuss the interpretation together. We were able to work on areas that are difficult to put together with the orchestra such as the *Recitativo*, coming out of the *cadenza*. My teacher, Nikolaj, attended the rehearsals and guided me on the balance with the orchestra and how I can better collaborate with the conductor to create the best performance together.

Performing the concerto was a blur. Before I knew it I was playing the final soaring high D (*sempre fff*) and the concerto was finished. 13 months of hard work was over in an exhilarating 15 minutes. It met with the most encouraging support from my fellow woodwind students and teachers. The reflection afterwards, using the recording, was most interesting and

offered me insight into both its successes and areas to improve. I learnt more about looking after my physical health to avoid pain and injury and I was able finally to add this incredible concerto to my repertoire. The learning process I developed serves me to this day and, indeed, very recently with creating a new set of specific 'Drills' to learn Richard Strauss' *Elektra* in my work at the Royal Danish Opera in Copenhagen.

My Final Projects module was one of the highlights from my four years studying at RBC.

## Ben Chilton: *Designing and 3D printing a reed gouging machine*



When I was told by my senior peers at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire that for our Final Project we were allowed to do 'anything we wanted, as long as it related to music in some way', I decided to design an oboe reed gouging machine with the use of Computer Aided Design and 3D printing.

Ever since I started playing the oboe, I have had a fascination with the mechanical side of the instrument, especially reed making. This interest in the mechanics



mostly derived from my pursuit of engineering before RBC, but also due to my family connections in this field: my grandfather, Barry Chilton, used to design and fabricate double reed equipment including gouging machines. Even though I pursued my love of music for my higher education at RBC, that interest in the mechanics always lingered throughout the entirety of my studies. So much so that in my 1st year I designed a reed holder made from layers of laser-cut Perspex that could hold 80 reeds. (I have never been able to fill it to this day.)

In my 2nd year I was given a job to look after and maintain the conservatoire's specialised double reed room and its collection of reed making equipment. The job involved making sure the reed making machines were constantly maintained, replacing parts and fixing any issues that arose. Through practical experience, I learned how these machines worked and more importantly how players used them. After seeing and conversing with different players on their individual wants and needs for reed making, I was able to come up with some goals for my project. The main ideas were for the gouger to be ambidextrous, to be small and portable, and finally to keep the operation of the equipment intuitive and simple for the user, so they would not need to spend any time reading the instruction manual!

The gouging machine I ended up designing was highly modular to account for the ambidextrous goal. It consisted of symmetric blocks that the user can flip to their preference. Since most gouging machines are very personal bits of kit this would realistically only ever have to be done once. However, if the machine needed to be readjusted for a user with the opposite dominant hand, all that was needed to change it was unscrewing a few bolts, flipping the block containing the blade and fastening the machine together again. I also designed it so the bed that the cane sat on was interchangeable to allow for different sized cane. And since the design is entirely modular, I could in theory design different modules for different applications, i.e. having a module block for oboe reeds and separate one for cor anglais reeds, avoiding the need for a completely separate machine.

I also designed a concept for an automatic gouging machine based on the 3D printer's mechanism, that would use industrial standard blades to gouge the cane. Together with that, a few other bits of

equipment and accessories including an oboe 'buzz stick' (based on the specialised tubular accessory used by brass players called a buzz stick/pipe to train and maintain their embouchure).

One of the most exciting parts of the project was being able to present my designs to Johnathan Kelly, Celia Craig and Ralph van Daal. Since this project was during the pandemic in 2020/21 I could only give my presentation over Zoom, but nevertheless it was fantastic to see the interest in my designs and ideas.

Currently, I am refining my designs further, as well as creating many new accessories. I am very excited to see how many more I can come up with, and get them all fully manufactured!

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### Rebecca Taylor: *Crusading outreach for the double reed instruments*



Using my Final Project to develop my skills in education and outreach work, I designed a series of workshops and a summative concert for local primary school children. The content explored orchestral woodwind and brass instruments as I wanted my project not only to promote the oboe, but also other instruments that are less popular with beginner musicians. The freedom and flexibility of the scheme allowed complete creativity for my ideas. I worked with a total of 120 students from two primary schools during this process.

I successfully applied for funding and organised an independent fundraiser to ensure that all students could participate free of charge. This has been valuable experience for future work, as many arts projects would not be possible without external financial support. I believe that in order to make classical music more accessible to young people, there must be more free and innovative opportunities for them to be exposed to it.

My workshops were designed to maximise

potential learning opportunities for pupils to take from the project. However, I ensured that they were entertaining, active, and directly engaged with each child. I laid particular emphasis on double reed instruments due to the lack of students studying them, basing one whole session around them. With help from a bassoonist, both instruments were demonstrated, and we played games that required students to distinguish between the instruments' sounds. I also gave pupils the opportunity to play on straw 'double reeds' which are created from cutting the top of a straw to a point. This allowed me to teach the embouchure of playing a double reed instrument and enabled pupils to play along with us.

The concert incorporated a storyline, costumes, projected images and coloured lighting as visual aids in an attempt to make it as impressive and influential as possible. In preparing for the concert, I had to arrange music for the first time. I chose popular classical repertoire from a variety of genres, for example Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* to focus on the oboe, Dukas' *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* for the bassoon and Puccini's *Nessun Dorma* for tuba. This allowed me to experiment with textures and timbres, but also gave me space to add movement and choreography into the performance. I introduced the instruments one by one, from solo to octet. Between instrumental introductions, I interacted with my fellow musicians, incorporating fun facts, questions for the audience and competitive, comedic games that challenged our instrumental capabilities.

Moreover, I was able to work creatively to design a take-home leaflet for pupils, advertising other local musical opportunities and providing information about each of the instruments they had heard. I wanted the project to have a long-term impact on participants, so I ensured that I provided them with resources to explore classical music further.

Completing my Final Project has consolidated my ambition to work in outreach after my recent graduation. I enjoyed the responsibility that came with independently producing a concert and planning workshops, for example, reaching out to participants, communicating with other musicians and organising rehearsals. It enabled me to build my confidence, not only in an educational setting but as a well-rounded musician. It has been one of the most valuable experiences of my time at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

## BDRS/RAM Double Reed Celebration

Sunday 29th October 2023 | 10:30-18:00

Royal Academy of Music

Marylebone Road, London NW1 5HT

We are very pleased to be presenting this event in partnership with the Royal Academy of Music, London, building on the very successful double reed day we held together last October. And very grateful to Fraser Gordon and the RAM for again hosting it. Come and enjoy a full day of sessions and performances from the Academy's double reed professors and students! The main lunchtime concert includes the World Premiere of the bassoon commission from the 2021 BDRS Composition Competition. *Spectre* by Pongtorn Techaboonakho will be performed by the fabulous Amy Harman.



### Annual General Meeting

The 2023 AGM of the BDRS will be held online through Zoom on Sunday 5th November at 7.00 pm.

In addition to reporting on our activities during 2022, we will be taking this opportunity to inform members about our continuing work, including some exciting new initiatives in progress or planned for 2024.

The meeting will also elect Society Officers and an Executive Committee to serve during 2024.

In order to join the meeting please request an invitation from the Secretary by sending an email to [secretary@bdrs.org.uk](mailto:secretary@bdrs.org.uk). Joining instructions including a Zoom link and any relevant papers will be sent out a few days before the meeting.

We are always delighted to hear from any members of the Society who may be interested in supporting our work as volunteers or with suggestions for new activities. To discuss this or any aspect of our activities you are invited to contact the Secretary, Paul Hubbard, at the email address above.

In addition to the lunchtime concert there will be performance classes and opportunities to play in tutored ensembles, with the day culminating in a mass play-together, as well as a wide range of instruments and accessories on offer from various traders.

What more could you want from a fabulous day of all things double reed?

### Introducing the BDRS Instrument Bank

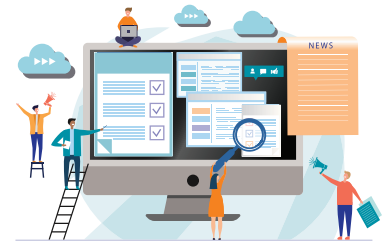
*James Turnbull writes about the establishment of this resource.*

The British Double Reed Society is excited to unveil a new initiative to help more budding double reeders across the UK – the BDRS Instrument Bank – launching in 2024. It has been made possible by the kind and generous donation of instruments from our valued BDRS members in recent months.

At the heart of the Society's mission lies the commitment to promote double reed instruments and make learning these instruments as accessible as possible. The creation of our Instrument Bank marks a significant step towards realising this goal. We are pleased to take this opportunity to encourage those who possess spare or under-utilised oboes and bassoons to consider donating them to the Instrument Bank. The BDRS is looking to build a collection of instruments encompassing beginner, intermediate and professional models across the oboe and bassoon families. This diversity ensures that aspiring musicians of all levels will benefit from your generosity and instrumental legacy. By participating in the Instrument Bank, you have the opportunity to empower budding talent, inspire musical aspiration and contribute to the vibrant double reed community that the BDRS embodies.

As we look ahead to the launch of the BDRS Instrument Bank in 2024, I invite you to contact me by emailing [chair@bdrs.org.uk](mailto:chair@bdrs.org.uk) if you have an instrument you would like to consider donating or have any questions about the scheme.





**Oboe and Bassoon Extravaganza!**



**Sunday 8th October 2023**  
**10.30am-5.00pm, Concert at 5.30pm**  
Hosted by Wells Cathedral School

Open to all musicians under 18 years, of all musical abilities  
Admission £40 (bursaries available upon request)

Join us for an exciting, fun day of ensemble playing, masterclasses and more, culminating in a concert featuring THE WORLD PREMIERE of a new composition by Teresa Barlow.

Every participant will play in this exciting new piece!

Refreshments will be provided, but please bring a packed lunch.

To book your place  
Email: [education@wells-cathedral-school.org](mailto:education@wells-cathedral-school.org)  
01781 834807



# WELLS Extravaganza's Exciting Innovation!

*Liz Fyfe unveils a ground-breaking outreach model. Although the event itself pre-dates this issue of DRN, she raises important issues about how we spread the word about learning the double reed instruments.*



Liz Fyfe

For a long time, and like so many other teachers, I have been seriously concerned by the falling numbers of children taking up the oboe and bassoon, or even knowing of their existence. I felt that for the next double reed event held at Wells Cathedral School we should take a different approach. So with the full support of Ed (Edward Leaker, Head of Woodwind) and the school we have commissioned a new piece for our Extravaganza on 8th October.

I have been working with composer Teresa Barlow on a new concept, in which we incorporate local primary school children who have no prior musical experience at all to come to the day, learn how to squeak reeds and essentially have their first lesson on the bassoon and oboe. These complete beginners will squeak morse code for 'oboe' and 'bassoon' (yes, it fits quite nicely into 3/4 time!) as part of the piece, and rattle the keys. The piece is very carefully crafted to show off students of all abilities, each level of player having their moment in the sun. It finishes with a virtuosic cadenza for our 'guests' on the day, who are some of our great past students now working in the profession.



The idea of the concept is to show in one piece every learning stage along the oboe/bassoon journey. I hope it will be used as a new tool by music hubs/teachers/music schools everywhere to introduce the oboe and bassoon in a truly fun way. As the piece is modular, we will work in stage-appropriate groups on the day to give everyone confidence before bringing it all together to rehearse and then perform.

We will be joined on 8th October by students from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama as well as our own (and ex-) students at Wells, for them all to gain experience in outreach and community music. The piece will be part of the concert at the end of the day, which also features the guests and the RWCMD students.

*[Ed. DRN will carry a review of the event in the next issue.]*

## BDRS Receives Generous Donation to Aid Music Education Initiatives

*James Turnbull announces this heartwarming major development of our resources.*

I am thrilled to reveal that the British Double Reed Society has received a truly remarkable and generous bequest. This act of goodwill underscores the enduring commitment of individuals who share the BDRS's passion for music education and fostering a vibrant double reed community.

The BDRS extends its deepest gratitude to the donor – who has asked to remain anonymous – for this significant contribution. Their very generous gift of £50,000 opens new avenues of possibility for BDRS, allowing the Society to increase its efforts in providing access to double reed instruments and expert tuition within the oboe and bassoon families.

With this invaluable donation, the BDRS committee is eager to explore innovative ways to broaden our outreach initiatives. As we carefully deliberate on how to utilise this incredible support, the BDRS is focused on creating opportunities that will enable more people to learn to play double reed instruments.

As an example, I warmly encourage members to contact us if they are aware of local initiatives supporting double reed players in need of assistance. The society recognises the power of community collaboration and would like to reach areas of the country that might currently be underserved for double reed playing and tuition opportunities.

The ethos of the BDRS revolves around the belief that music education should be accessible to all, regardless of background or circumstance. This substantial donation will enable the Society to increase its work in the coming years. We look forward to sharing updates with you about how the BDRS will be using this donation in the coming months.

For inquiries or to share information on local schemes, please contact me direct ([chair@bdrs.org.uk](mailto:chair@bdrs.org.uk)).

## Sound and Music's Fair Access Principles

*BDRS committed to the Fair Access Principles in August 2023.*

Sound and Music replied saying:

“We're delighted that British Double Reed Society joined us as partner by signing up to our Fair Access Principles in August 2023.

Developed through consultation with a broad range of composers and organisations, Sound and Music's Fair Access Principles are designed to act as a code of best practice for running successful, open and inclusive artist development programmes, competitions and awards for composers. In signing up, British Double Reed Society is committing to enact the Fair Access Principles across their work over the next two years. We recognise that organisations will need time to think about and implement changes within their programmes.

The logo for Fair Access, featuring a stylized equals sign followed by the words "Fair Access" in a bold, sans-serif font.

You can read their reasons for signing up and future commitments the organisation have made below.

British Double Reed Society's Statement: 'We are thrilled to have signed up to the Fair Access Principles. Embracing inclusivity and ensuring accessibility hold significant importance for the British Double Reed Society, as we endeavour to advance double reed music across the UK. Our heartfelt gratitude extends to the entire team at Sound and Music for conceiving this framework, which will aid us in connecting with a wide range of individuals and dismantling any barriers that might have previously been problematic.'

## Independent Society of Musicians and Musicians' Union Code of Practice

*BDRS has also recently signed up to the ISM-MU's Code of Practice.*

The Code of Practice is a set of principles that aims to eradicate bullying, harassment, discrimination and other forms of inappropriate behaviour within the sector. These principles also aim to aid employers in meeting their legal requirements as well as setting out a shared vision for promoting and maintaining a positive working culture.



# 2021 BDRS Composition Competition



Pongtorn Techaboonakho



Amy Harman



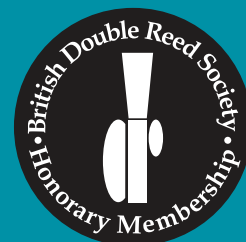
*Alison Wathey reminds us that the final element of the competition inaugurated in 2021 will take place this month.*

The premiere of *Spectre*, the new work commissioned from Pongtorn Techaboonakho, winner of the BDRS-Leitzinger Open Prize for Bassoon Composition, will be given by Amy Harman at the event on 29th October 2023 at the Royal Academy of Music, with the composer planning to be in attendance.

We are very much looking forward to this premiere, and to the subsequent publication of *Spectre*, by Emerson Edition Ltd. That will conclude this inaugural BDRS composition competition, the stages of which have been recorded in DRN ever since its launch in the summer of 2021.

With generous support from several sponsorship partners, this competition has added a new dimension to the work of the BDRS and provided composers with an incentive to write for double reed instruments, with prizes including the premieres and publication of the winners' commissioned works.

## Honorary Membership for Michael



BDRS has marked Michael Britton's special birthday (see Page 4) with the award of Honorary Membership, to recognise his inspiration and dedication since its inception.

We are delighted that he has accepted this award, something which he has deserved time and time again over the life of this Society.





# Words and Music

Clive Fairbairn

Clive reflects on his first 100 issues as Editor and considers the next stage for Double Reed News.



I am conjuring up the sardonic smile on the face of my English teacher Mr Davenport. His chin is in the palm of his left hand, his right clasps a pen. He is marking with little enthusiasm and liberal red ink my latest unconvincing essay! He was only too aware that my spare time was dedicated to the many aspects of music that absorbed me, rather than literary semantics or syntax. He would doubtless have been very surprised therefore to learn that one day I too would be wielding a red pen, editing articles for a magazine. If he had, he would certainly have expected the publication to be related in some way to music.

Truth to tell I had no idea of that possibility either. In my early teens school subjects had not interested me. Apart from some moderate talent at the piano, I was easily distracted by opportunities for boyish pranks, including with one particular classmate who later morphed into John Paul Jones, the bass guitarist and co-founder of Led Zeppelin! A couple of years later my parents bought our first LP record player; I discovered Mendelssohn's *Hebrides Overture* and was soon learning

how to follow the orchestral score: it was transformational! Aged 15 I had the chance to take bassoon lessons and became fascinated by composing/arranging and began conducting groups of musical friends

The Royal Academy of Music was more than usually short of bassoon students the year they let me in, ensuring this late-starter had some extremely fast catching up to do. That scarcity led me into rather more student orchestral playing than I merited, including self-taught contrabassoon. I especially remember being conducted by my then idol Sir John Barbirolli, in Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* in the vastness of St. Paul's



Cathedral. On that occasion I was playing a particularly tall ancient contra which didn't come apart at all, making tube journeys in rush hour supremely challenging! Sir John's only comment to me in the rehearsals was: 'Contrabassoon! Will you put that instrument down when you are not playing it: I can't see the semi-chorus!' Now I conjure up another sardonic face, that of my RAM piano professor, Alan Richardson. When my preparation fell short of his expectations he would address me in his broad Scots accent as 'Laddie', and I knew to expect the worst. Alan was not in good health so the RAM let him teach his students at home. This afforded the opportunity







Graham Salter

to meet his wife, Janet Craxton, which proved invaluable some years later when I formed the New Mozart Orchestra.<sup>1</sup> Janet became its Principal Oboe bringing favourite colleagues with her, including Martin Gatt.

Fast forward several decades in a career which had all to do with music but very little with English essays, we reach 1995; my wife Nicky, our two young daughters and I are returning to England from five years working in Africa. Having been so very far from home and with the internet only in its infancy, I was unaware of the still fledgling British Double Reed Society. However, Nicky was very soon appointed the oboe specialist for Berkshire's instrumental teaching service<sup>2</sup> where she met bassoonist Nick Ingamells, then the Editor of Double Reed News.

Nick became intrigued about our challenging experiences in Africa so he asked Nicky and I to write an article about them. He was pleased with the result and published it.<sup>3</sup> When Nicky revealed that I had done the majority of the writing, he asked if I would consider becoming the next DRN editor.

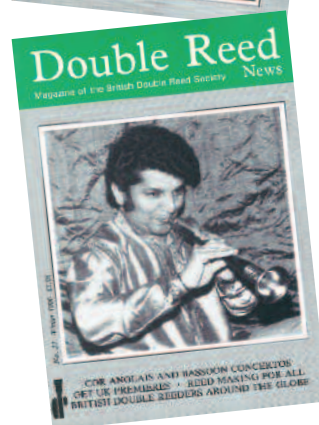
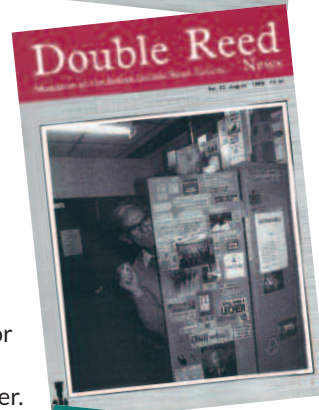
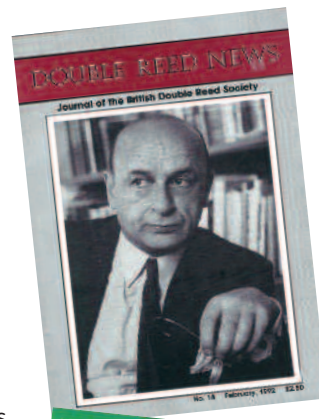
Although by this time I had gained considerable experience of writing reports and editing documents, I had little idea how a magazine was produced. Having, nonetheless, collated the contents of countless concert programmes, including programme notes and soloists' biographies, I thought: 'Surely a magazine is like a big programme?' Fortunately friends with professional editing and publication experience proved helpful; once I had thoroughly picked their brains,

I felt sufficiently confident to try my hand at the job. Sarah Francis, then Chair of the BDRS committee, discussed the matter at length with me and we decided I should edit two issues on a trial basis.

### Magazine Production

In those pre-computer days Nick assembled articles 'camera-ready', to the point that the printers could combine them with the physically scanned black and white photos ready for printing and despatch. Nick had done this since issue 12 when he became Secretary of the BDRS committee, so I was much relieved that he was prepared to continue with that under my editorship. In addition to his extensive experience, he had himself edited five issues (32-36). In all he served a highly creditable seven years dedicated to establishing both the society and its magazine. Nick's predecessor as editor was oboist and keen photographer Graham Salter. In addition to editing issues 20 to 31, he set high expectations for the quality of photos in the magazine. His part in establishing DRN's high reputation is immense. Given both the variability of authors' photographic skills and their equipment in those days, the standards of photos were hard to uphold. We are talking before the camera-phone revolution of course which has not only encouraged general improvements but also permitted the emailing of images directly to the editor, now common practice.

Since Double Reed News began thirty-five years ago there have been, as in so



much of life, huge technological developments in the production of printed publications. A great deal of what Nick, Graham, and the first DRN editor Bill Waterhouse, had to contend with has changed beyond recognition. They were supported from the start by the Nottingham-based printing company Mastaprint, owned by Graham Masters, which continued to print DRN right up to 2021. Like so many printers, Mastaprint found the changes affecting the industry challenging to negotiate, resisting embracing computerisation until it became inevitable.

Double Reed News was not immune from this turmoil in the industry, especially around the millennium. At this time Graham Masters brought in another Nottingham company, D Graphic Services, to take on the design and production part of the process, leaving Mastaprint with the printing and despatch. This proved a felicitous move and D Graphics still performs the design stage to this day, and to a very high standard.

### Contemplating the DRN Archive

On taking up the post of Editor I was somewhat alarmed to be put in charge of multiple copies of all 36 previous editions. So I promptly purchased a box file to take one example of each, creating the start of my 'Editor's Archive'. There are now five box files and I am about to start the sixth!

Despite the injunction 'don't judge a book by its cover' I am taking a look at a selection of our magazines through their front covers, in search of some distinctive images.

The first five issues were simple duplicated newsletters, but from No.6 DRN appeared in the

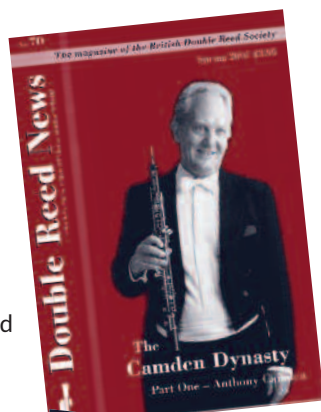
familiar size and shape that endures today. The otherwise B&W format was enhanced by simple single colour front and back covers, that changed for each issue.

The next few editions were graced by British double reed stars of the time: Gordon Hunt, William Waterhouse and Neil Black. Russian Valery Popov was also featured due to his imminent appearance at the Manchester IDRS Conference of 1989. Later there followed some fine cover portraits such as Irene Pragnell (14), a whimsical Gwydion Brooke (18) and a pensive Sidney Sutcliffe (23).

Less reverential were Meyrick Alexander's Elvis impression (28) and a mischievous photo of Bernard Greenlees (32) furtively peering out, cigarette in hand, from behind a locker room door! For me the stand-out cover photo of this period is No.26; a most beautiful portrait of Joy Boughton prompting the reader to open and find the appreciation of her, written by Sarah Francis.

For my first edition (36) I realised I needed to make my own mark and sought a distinctive subject with a cover to match. At the time a very good Indian friend working for the British Council had invited me to his wedding, which led to my discovery of the Shehnai, a ceremonial oboe for Indian weddings. A fine photo of this instrument was found for the front cover and I was launched!

Glancing through the next 20 issues the covers remind me of topics I first edited: marking the centenary of the birth of Léon Goossens (38–40) and early manifestations of children's



bassoons (45). By very dynamic contrast there are hell's angels (48) and Hoffnung's cartoon of Jock Sutcliffe (57).

A significantly new design style was launched from No.70 led by Penny Cox and Clare Glenister, which not only improved the appearance inside but significantly on the covers too. From this issue the cover artwork was 'bled' to the outside edge giving it a much more up-to-date look. Anthony Camden's photo on the front of that edition was still B&W however; but by No.87 transatlantic harmony was declared with overlapping portions of the Union Jack and Stars and Stripes flags in full-colour to publicise the IDRS 2009 International Conference in Birmingham.

From 2013, colour printing – still expensive compared to B&W – was judiciously introduced onto a small selection of inside pages. No.102's cover and some of the inside pages feature beautiful full-colour photography of the Howarth-Redgate oboe. By two years further on, the majority of magazine images are full colour including the somewhat alarming cover (110) showing sporty soloist Bram van Sambeek on his bicycle holding, though not blowing(!), his bassoon.

The world was beginning to escape the restrictions of the pandemic by Summer 2021, so the committee felt that it was perfect timing for a thorough update to the whole design of DRN; it would provide a good signal that BDRS too was restored and ready for action. Our much valued design partners D Graphic Services came up with the winning submission which can be seen from issue 129, with its 'essence of new growth' cover of arundo donax.

## The future includes the past

BDRS is on the verge of making the thousands of articles, reviews and other content from the 136 editions of DRN accessible to members of BDRS via a searchable index on our website. This is a truly significant moment for all members, also for the wider double reed community.

Whether you have joined recently or been a member for many years, you will know the wide-ranging content in each issue. Multiply this by 136 editions and the prospects for both the keen researcher and the casual reader will be vast. Members will naturally be given free access: details will be announced as soon as possible.

## Music and Words

Choosing the right adjective to describe the work of editing Double Reed News is not easy. Many come to mind – absorbing, compelling, frustrating occasionally – but always stimulating. I am continually amazed that, from such a seemingly restricted genre, subjects blossom and cascade, one after another from edition to edition.

To quote Stephen Fry:

“For all of us who use language for work or pleasure or just enjoy reading... that resonates so strongly, and parallels perfectly with listening to music...”<sup>4</sup>

## Endnotes:

1. Founded in 1976, New Mozart Orchestra conducted by Clive Fairbairn gave many public concerts in St John's Smith Square and Queen Elizabeth Hall until 1990. Since the millennium NMO has provided outreach work in schools in the counties to the west of London and is the resident professional orchestra of Buckinghamshire.
2. Berkshire Young Musicians' Trust, later known as Berkshire Maestros.
3. Against All Odds (DRN No. 36).
4. Stephen Fry, in the recent series of This Cultural Life (BBC Radio4/BBCSounds).



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## Young Bassoon Programme

at the Royal College of Music

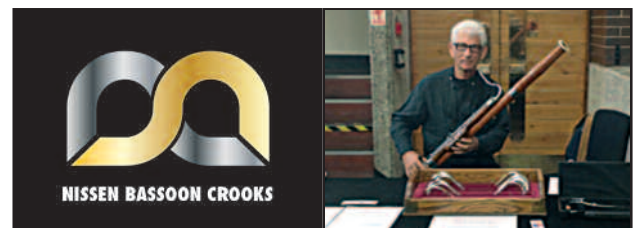
19 November, 21 January,  
4 February, 3 March, 28 April



11-18  
year olds



[rcm.ac.uk/youngbassoon](http://rcm.ac.uk/youngbassoon)



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For full details:

[www.davidnissen.com/nissen-bassoon-crooks-bocals](http://www.davidnissen.com/nissen-bassoon-crooks-bocals)

# Volodymyr Runchak, a true Performer's Composer

Vladyslav Demianov

Vladyslav is a Masters student at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.



I was born and raised in Zaporizhzhia, a city in south-eastern Ukraine that stretches for several miles along the picturesque Dnieper river. I began my musical studies playing the Ukrainian flute and saxophone; when I was about 12 years old, I switched to the bassoon and have never regretted it since. I took my Bachelors degree at the Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine in Kyiv and then started my Masters programme. From 2020 to 2022, I worked as Principal Bassoonist at the Kyiv Opera, whilst still a conservatoire student.

Everything changed overnight when Russia invaded Ukraine. I fled Ukraine for safety and in order to complete my disrupted studies in the UK. I joined the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire to study with Nikolaj Henriques, which wouldn't have been possible without the support I received from Jenni Philips, Head of Woodwind at RBC and Simon Over, Music Director and Principal Conductor of Southbank Sinfonia. I have since enjoyed

playing with the Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra and occasionally performing as soloist and as part of other ensembles in Shrewsbury, Malvern and Wigston.

For my Masters recital at the RBC in May 2023, I chose to perform a piece of music from *The Bassoonist's Notebook* written by my countryman Volodymyr Runchak. It was well received by the audience and highly graded by the examination board. Then an idea just crossed my mind: why not introduce Volodymyr Runchak to UK performers so that they could enjoy his music too?

The first thing to say about Volodymyr Runchak is that he is a prolific and influential composer of contemporary music in Ukraine; he is also a conductor and a member of the National Union of Composers of Ukraine. In these unprecedented times for Ukraine, he is continuing his work with composing, conducting, teaching, in concert and educational activities, elevating and promoting new Ukrainian music worldwide.

Volodymyr Runchak was born on 12th May 1960 in Lutsk, Ukraine. From 1979 to 1986 he studied at the Kyiv State Conservatoire and graduated as an accordionist, conductor and composer. Between 1992 and 1995, he attended the Brandenburg Colloquium for New Music in Berlin led by P. Dietrich, D. Schnebel, K. Huber, F. Globokar and E. Denisov. In 1998, he founded the New Music in Ukraine Orchestra to promote works of contemporary Ukrainian and international composers. Concerts of 'New Music in Ukraine' have been supported by the National All-Ukrainian Music Union, the Goethe Institute, along with the embassies of Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, France, Great Britain, Hungary, Germany and Poland.

In 2005, Volodymyr Runchak was awarded L'ordre du merite culturel in recognition of his distinctive contribution to the culture and arts in Poland. In 2007/2008 and 2010/2011, he was the Principal Guest Conductor of the Kara Karayev State Chamber Orchestra of Azerbaijan as well as working with symphony and chamber orchestras in Kyiv, Lviv, Odessa, Kharkiv, Zaporizhia, Luhansk, Rivne (Ukraine) and with music groups in Russia, Kazakhstan, Bulgaria, Israel and France.<sup>1</sup>



Volodymyr Runchak  
Source: [vrunchak.wixsite.com/runchak](http://vrunchak.wixsite.com/runchak)

Volodymyr Runchak's works have been performed at festivals and concerts of contemporary music in almost all European and some Asian countries. As a composer, he has created about two hundred pieces, including an opera, several symphonies for large symphony and chamber orchestras, cantatas, oratorios, a large array of chamber-instrumental works, vocal chamber compositions, etc.



Volodymyr Runchak's chamber repertoire for the bassoon includes *The Bassoonist's Notebook* (2 pieces for bassoon solo, 3 pieces for bassoon and piano); *Homo ludens XI*; *My Sound Metaphors* or "for three..." for oboe, clarinet and bassoon; *Quartet* for four bassoons; *Parade of virtuosos* for wind quintet; *Three's a crowd...* for bassoon and piano; *In Search of Tranquillity*, a letter to ten musicians.

Driven by the desire of exploring natural processes and acoustic phenomena, Volodymyr Runchak writes pieces of music that create a completely new perceptive and aesthetic environment. They require a great deal of collaboration between the composer and the performer, and between the performer and the listener in the concert hall. If this 'alchemy' is harmonic, the instrument turns into an animated

at the end of the *Lamento*, producing an eerie effect.' I recall my fellow students from Kyiv saying that in Runchak's works for woodwinds there are a lot of things to challenge the instrumentalist: exceptional technical skills are required, but also intellectual and emotional involvement in the music.

Recent years have been fruitful in terms of exposure of Runchak's works where the bassoon is either a solo or an ensemble instrument, or a solo instrument with orchestra. In particular, in April 2022, the *Parade of virtuosos* for wind quintet was performed in Wrocław, Poland; in October 2022 Runchak conducted the Bassoon Concerto with the Nino Rota Orchestra and Krzysztof Kamiński. In February 2023, the world premiere of the complete version of the *Quartet for four bassoons* took place in Nuremberg, Germany. Currently, the composer is awaiting the world premiere of the *Three's a crowd* for bassoon and piano and *Five Stars*, a concerto for woodwind quartet and symphony orchestra.

This has been a great celebration of his woodwind music which deserves to be better known in the UK. Indeed, Volodymyr Runchak is an inspiring advocate of contemporary music, a composer with a distinctive compositional style that is 'a fusion of emotionalism and structural precision' and, more importantly, a true promoter of the twenty-first century bassoon to contemporary audiences.

I am always in contact with Volodymyr Runchak keeping an eye out for new works for my instrument. At the present moment I am working on my thesis 'Characteristics of chamber music by Volodymyr Runchak' that enables me to appreciate and explore his unique compositional style in greater depth. For my next project I am planning to perform and record the full album of *The Bassoonist's Notebook*, together with students of the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

#### Endnotes:

1. Volodymyr Runchak composer and conductor – official website: [vrunchak.wixsite.com/runchak](http://vrunchak.wixsite.com/runchak)
2. Volodymyr Runchak – Moto Perpetuo for bassoon. Available at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=w75DWhy2\\_dl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w75DWhy2_dl)

### Bassoon

To Trio Aventure: Alexander Ott (oboe), Walter Ifrim (clarinet), Wolfgang Rüdiger (bassoon)

#### MY SOUND METAPHORS OR "FOR THREE..."

FOR OBOE, CLARINET AND BASSOON

### Bassoon

#### THREE'S A CROWD...

FOR BASSOON AND PIANO

Source: [vrunchak.wixsite.com/runchak](http://vrunchak.wixsite.com/runchak)

I had the great pleasure to perform pieces from *The Bassoonist's Notebook* and the *Quartet for four bassoons* with fellow students at the Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine and later at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. As a bassoonist, I must say that Volodymyr Runchak is a true performer's composer who uses extended compositional, instrumental and stage techniques, demanding deep involvement by the performer in the execution of the music in a manner that is distinct from the conventional music paradigm.



creature on the stage, grabbing all the audience's attention and unveiling the true heterogeneity of its colours.

I am not alone in thinking that Runchak's music communicates complex emotions to its listeners. In 2017, two contemporary pieces for bassoon – *Lamento* and *Moto Perpetuo* – were performed and studio recorded by renowned bassoonist Laurence Perkins.<sup>2</sup> In his view, they are:

'...highly expressive and emotionally charged, using the full note range of the instrument plus a multiphonic heard twice

# Obituary Tribute: Fritz Berent

## Tribute to a Talented Bassoonist, and a Long Life Well Lived



Born 15th May 1929,  
died 8th July 2023

**Alison Tarry writes about her grandfather:** Fritz – or Freddie as he was better known – was born in Sopot, then a part of Germany, to Jewish parents in very uncertain times. Together with his older brother Paul, he made his way to safety in England on the Kindertransport, spending the next few years living with a family on a farm in Gloucestershire. Meanwhile, his parents had a trickier time of things, spending much of the war dependent on the kindness of strangers, hiding in a cave in Italy.

He was musical from a young age, first learning to play the violin before being

offered a bassoon found in storage by his music teacher. He took great enjoyment in mastering the bassoon and later the contrabassoon. This was the start of a successful career in classical music, firstly in Leeds for the ballet orchestra that later became the English National Ballet, and later, for decades, in the Covent Garden Orchestra at the Royal Opera House. He took great pleasure in playing amongst other brilliant musicians and working with some of the greatest conductors in the world.

His job took him all over the globe, including to the USA, Australia and Japan. He was always the one amongst the groups keenest to make the most of any sightseeing opportunities, organising various trips for all the musicians.

Freddie also played a part in helping the Wombles to enter the pop music charts in the 1970s, playing the bassoon on several projects for Mike Batt. His work as a session musician also included a memorable job working with George Harrison and Eric Clapton on the album *All Things Must Pass*. He was very proud to have played at the wedding of the then Prince Charles and Princess Diana in

1981. His memento of this day – a slice of their wedding cake – remained preserved in his freezer!

Freddie's love of music was shared with his late wife Helen, late daughter Pauline and late son Andrew, and continues to live on in Pauline's husband Robin and children Sam and I. Andrew lived his life with Down's Syndrome and was never happier than when his constant requests for the

'black box' (aka a bassoon recital from his Dad) were granted. When Andrew was born in the 1950s, not much was known about living with disability and the family were instrumental in coming together with other families of disabled children that they encountered to form a charitable organisation called Kith and Kids that continues to offer valuable support to this day.

Freddie was also generous in his support of other musicians, including family friend and mentee Grace Meadows, whose career he followed with great pride and who continues to play his contrabassoon.

Freddie will be deeply missed by all who knew and loved him.





# Noticeboard

## Listings of courses and events of interest to double reed players

### John White's Wind Chamber Music

5th – 7th Jan:

**Tutors: John White, Andrew Smith, Shane Moroney**

This course offers an opportunity to meet in a friendly and supportive atmosphere to play chamber music in various groupings. Music is provided and will be varied throughout the course. Benslow Music, Benslow Lane, Hitchin SG4 9RB 01462 459446 [info@benslowmusic.org](mailto:info@benslowmusic.org)

### 2024 Wind Serenades at Higham Hall (Lake District)

18th – 23rd Feb:

For advanced players above grade 8 (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn) with tutors John Anderson and Laurence Perkins. [www.laurenceperkins.com/wind-serenades/](http://www.laurenceperkins.com/wind-serenades/)

### Oboe Weekend

5th – 7th April:

**Level: Intermediate-Advanced with Jean Marsden and Ruth Watson**

Work with experienced tutors and an accompanist on solo and ensemble playing, with a particular focus on performance and technique. Gain tips on coaxing those reeds to co-operate. Fee: £360  
Jackdaws Music, Great Elm, Frome, BA11 3NY 01373 812383 [music@jacdaws.org](mailto:music@jacdaws.org)

### Bassoon Course at Higham Hall (Lake District)

24th – 28th April:

With tutors Roger Birnstingl and Laurence Perkins, and pianist John Gough [www.laurenceperkins.com/wind-serenades/](http://www.laurenceperkins.com/wind-serenades/)

### Bassoon Weekend 'From Reed to Recital' with Robert Codd

7th – 9th June:

**Level: Intermediate-Advanced**

Experience playing in tutored ensembles: from duets to octets, developing sight-reading and enjoying the sheer exhilaration of working together. Many aspects of bassoon technique will be examined and explained. The course will end with an informal concert. Fee: £352  
Jackdaws Music, Great Elm, Frome, BA11 3NY 01373 812383 [music@jacdaws.org](mailto:music@jacdaws.org)

### Wind Serenades on the Dorset Coast

10th – 16th June:

For advanced players above grade 8 (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn), with tutors Laurence Perkins and pianist Yoshiko Endo [www.laurenceperkins.com/wind-serenades/](http://www.laurenceperkins.com/wind-serenades/)

### Wind Serenades at Higham Hall (Lake District)

7th – 12th July:

For high-level advanced players of diploma standard (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn) with tutors Philippa Davies, Jan Willem Nelleke, Colin Honour and Laurence Perkins [www.laurenceperkins.com/wind-serenades/](http://www.laurenceperkins.com/wind-serenades/)

### Chamber Music Weekend with Stephen Gutman, Robert Codd, Sue Dent and Ian Mitchell

12th – 14th July:

**Level: Advanced**

Always a hugely popular course, offering the opportunity for wind players and two pianists to study and perform ensemble music from the eighteenth to twenty-first centuries. Each player will study four works over the weekend. Please contact the Jackdaws Office to check on the availability of places before booking. Fee: £320  
Jackdaws Music, Great Elm, Frome, BA11 3NY 01373 812383 [music@jacdaws.org](mailto:music@jacdaws.org)

### Wind Serenades at Park Place, Wickham, Hampshire

14th – 17th Oct:

For elementary players between grades 3-5 (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn) tutored by Laurence Perkins. [www.laurenceperkins.com/wind-serenades/](http://www.laurenceperkins.com/wind-serenades/)

### Wind Serenades at Higham Hall (Lake District)

30th Oct – 3rd Nov:

For intermediate players of grades 6-8 (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn) with tutors Mandy Burvill and Laurence Perkins. [www.laurenceperkins.com/wind-serenades/](http://www.laurenceperkins.com/wind-serenades/)

# Caribbean Connections

Ellen Wilkinson

Working with the oboists of the Antigua and Barbuda Youth Symphony Orchestra.

## About the Orchestra

The Antigua and Barbuda Youth Symphony Orchestra was initially developed in 2018, after a groundbreaking schools concert series, titled *Playing to Inspire*, was orchestrated by the country's High

Commissioner, Karen-Mae Hill OBE. It showcased the talents of the Kanneh-Mason family, who have paternal Antiguan heritage, and sparked the dream for an orchestra on the island which enabled unfettered access to musical education and performance. Five years later,

as I proudly stood among the young musicians of the ABSYO soaking up their audience's applause, I can confirm that this ambition has been realised with remarkable success.

My connection with the ABYSO began in 2019, through the Purcell School for Young Musicians' community engagement team, *Impulse*. The trip was organised by the school's head of composition, Alison Cox OBE, through the Commonwealth Resounds charity, which she established in 2005 with the aim of connecting the Commonwealth's musical cultures. The school's trip would mark the first international educational visit to the orchestra.

Myself and nine of my peers had each raised £1000 to fund a twelve day trip to work with the young musicians, leading orchestral sectional rehearsals, partaking in composition workshops, and performing in a collaborative concert series. The anticipation for the trip had been building since the first whisper of the Caribbean had flickered down school corridors, and stepping off the plane was no disappointment. The rich, shimmering chime of a steel pan sang through the airport in a harmonious welcome hug. This was a musical nation.

After the success of the Purcell School's visit, the ABSYO's rapid progress was cruelly impeded – along with the rest of the world's – by the 2020 global pandemic. Nevertheless, with characteristic perseverance, the team set about creating an online educational music programme, offering individual and group Zoom instrumental lessons to guide students through an unmotivating time. Karen-Mae





approached me in May 2020, asking if I would volunteer to teach oboe online to ABYSO students. I was delighted to hear from her, and finding myself with an unexpected excess of time in my first year of studying at the Royal Academy of Music, I enthusiastically agreed. The position was formalised in September 2020, and I have been the oboe tutor for the ABSYO for three years.

### The challenges and joys of international online oboe teaching

2020 was a confusing time for all, and beginning my oboe teaching career by giving Zoom lessons to Antigua seemed part and parcel of the remarkable ways in which musicians were persisting in their craft.

The challenges were multiple. The five hour time difference meant that my students had lessons at 8 or 9am on a Sunday morning, which in the early stages resulted in excess dizziness, along with disturbed family members and neighbours. Navigating reeds online continues to be difficult; several times I asked a student to hold one up to the camera and tilt it closer – but not too close! – in order to assess whether the opening was too big, too closed or ‘goldilocks perfect’. Adjusting a student’s reed is obviously impossible, but I have explained that the wire should not slip, the wrapping must be replaced, and a cracked reed is unfortunately for the bin.

Maintaining sufficient internet connection varies hugely, but I have developed interminable patience when myself or a student cut out, and the lesson must be renewed a few minutes later, in the hope that it is not interrupted before the next musical passage or technical concept can be covered. One student had lessons in his backyard, and chickens and cockerels would crow enthusiastically – a rather helpful demonstration of the sound I was asking him to achieve when warming up a reed!

Another challenge comes when teaching the physicality of an instrument; the small Zoom window does not permit the 360 degree perspective that a woodwind teacher relies on to instil deep breathing, safe posture and efficient finger technique. A particularly alarming and hilarious moment was when realising only at the end of a lesson that a beginner student’s hands were the wrong way up on the keys, the



screen’s perspective having distorted my perception like a mirror.

Despite this, it has been a delight to watch my students diligently persevere and improve, supported by their weekly in-person orchestra rehearsals, which are invaluable for giving context to their online lessons and a social element to their music making. Since September 2021, I have taught a voracious boy called David, now aged 16, who bravely decided to switch from the trombone. His mathematical brain quickly revealed itself in a love for scales and harmonic analysis, and he proceeded to teach himself every scale independently, relishing the challenge of my quizzing at the start of each lesson. He has since progressed to performing *Gabriel’s Oboe* with the ABYSO in just

18 months of playing, and is the only woodwind student to have performed a solo piece with the orchestra. David also plays the bass guitar in a band and is considering pursuing music at higher education. In his words, “music is my passion”, and the ABYSO’s online teaching programme has enabled him to discover and channel this love through the oboe, an instrument previously unfamiliar to his country.

In July, I was lucky enough to return to Antigua and met my two wonderful current oboe students, David and Ja’Quan, for the first time in person. Seeing them work together in rehearsals and hearing how far they had come without a single in-person lesson made every trial and tribulation infinitely worth it.





With patience and a positive mindset, the possibilities for international instrumental teaching are incredibly exciting. Global musical connections can be fostered, and young people who had never heard of the oboe can soon enough perform orchestral solos with indelible excitement. For those who are sceptical of musical learning online, I would argue that if the choice is for a young person to begin a rare instrument on Zoom or not begin it at all, the former is always worthwhile.

### 2023 Summertime Concert Series: Create, Perform, Inspire

My recent return to Antigua was also organised through Commonwealth Resounds, but this time the UK group included alumni and staff from the Purcell School, as well as musicians from the Universities of Cambridge and Leeds. Revisiting the island was a joy. Driving to the same hotel as in 2019 – the Jolly Beach Resort – I glimpsed an aptly named “Flamboyant Tree” out of the bus window. The tree’s bright red flowers festoon its stretching horizontal branches, causing dappled shadow patterns which soften the strong tropical sun.

The aim of the next twelve days was to present three concerts, including the orchestra’s inaugural performance on Antigua’s picturesque sister island, Barbuda, which has a population of 1600 and is still

recovering from the brutal hurricane Irma which left it devastated in 2017. Our repertoire was a summery cocktail of delights, including Johann Brahms’ *Hungarian Dance*, *West Side Story’s I Feel Pretty* and a healthy dose of Disney and Abba Medleys. Rehearsals ran from 3-8pm, since many ABYSO members were working summer jobs or still in school every morning. We quickly realised that these young individuals do not shy away from hard work.

We divided the sectional time into group workshops and individual instrumental sessions. Group sessions began with physical and musical warmups, before exploring how to blend as a section and focusing on tricky passages in the repertoire. Members of the ABYSO wind section led improvisatory games, and conducted sections from the pieces. In the oboe specific sectionals, I was able

to consolidate postural and technical corrections which I had been explaining online. I also ran a reed adjusting workshop, as well as donating reed and oboe maintenance equipment to the ABYSO.

Later in the day, we had full orchestral rehearsals, and I was incredibly impressed by how much the sound and

skill had developed since 2019. A highlight was watching my student David play *Gabriel’s Oboe* for the first time with the orchestra, and marvelling at his grace,

A highlight was watching my student David play *Gabriel’s Oboe* for the first time with the orchestra

confidence and musicality, as well as the depth of sound and expression emerging from the string section. The rehearsals were lengthy, and we were energised with a generous supply of Jamaican patties and a somewhat magical fizzy pink grapefruit juice only found in the Caribbean, called Ting.

These rehearsals culminated in a brilliant outdoor concert in Antigua, in which we collaborated with a local dance school, and an ambitious concert in Barbuda, which involved a notoriously rough ferry crossing, building our own venue in oppressive heat, and a sudden rainstorm mid James Bond Theme Tune! Despite the challenges of the day, it was incredibly special for the ABYSO to ignite the spark of what will hopefully become a more developed musical infrastructure on the island. A particular highlight was the performance from the young beginner Barbudan recorder players, who, guided by my colleague Daniel Swani, created a piece inspired by a steam train, using extended instrumental techniques and improvisation.

Alongside these concerts, there was an innovative composition programme, called “Go Compose Antigua”, where members of the orchestra could choose to take part in either film, jazz or general composition workshops, culminating in a showcasing of their pieces which were performed by the Commonwealth Resounds musicians. I was very proud to be conducted by my student Ja’Quan in a performance of his wind quartet, *The Sky*, which was inspired by a memory of looking out of a plane window.

As our own plane took off for Gatwick, I was filled with gratitude at having had the opportunity to revisit such an effusively welcoming, strikingly beautiful and musically driven country, and work alongside a reliably inspiring group of young people. The ABYSO make their first trip to London in October, working with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Brent Youth Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Academy of Music. I’ve advised my students to pack proper jumpers, and cannot wait to see them perform in RAM’s grand Duke’s Hall, where I have spent the last four years striving to achieve orchestral excellence and musically connect with audiences.





## Royal College of Music launches the RCM Young Bassoon Programme

*Marie Lloyd, RCM Head of Woodwind explains the scheme.*

The RCM Young Bassoon Programme is a wonderful new opportunity for young bassoonists. From instrumental classes to masterclasses and ensemble playing with RCM professors and postgraduate students, each day will offer a unique variety of exciting musical experiences. By joining our programme at the Royal College of Music, players will be welcomed into a community of bassoon enthusiasts who love to make music together.

The RCM's free training programme for young bassoonists will give 11-18-year olds the opportunity to join with other young bassoonists and learn from world-leading teachers.

The deadline for applications is 31 October 2023. For further information please visit [www.rcm.ac.uk/youngbassoon](http://www.rcm.ac.uk/youngbassoon) or email [youngbassoonprogramme@rcm.ac.uk](mailto:youngbassoonprogramme@rcm.ac.uk).

Aimed at bassoonists from Grade 4 to post-diploma, participants will spend time with leading bassoon teachers exploring new

repertoire in ensembles, masterclasses and creative collaborations, as well as learning more about breathing techniques and reed-making. They will also gain valuable advice about how to prepare for auditions, develop performance skills, and will receive peer-to-peer support from other young bassoonists in a welcoming environment.

Taking place on selected Sundays throughout the year, the sessions will be divided by ability and led by RCM bassoon professors including Sarah Burnett, Martin Gatt, Joost Bosdijk, Emily Hultmark and Roberto Giaccaglia who all hold positions in leading orchestras and chamber ensembles. They will be supported by RCM postgraduate students.

The inaugural 2023/24 programme will take place on 19th November 2023, and 21st January, 4th February, 3rd March and 28th April 2024.



Photo: Claire Chevalier

## Gloucestershire Double Reed Day July 2023

A report by *Liam Fleet*.

For over 40 years, the annual Gloucestershire Double Reed Day has been one of the UK's foremost regional double reed events. Now organised by Peter Kerr and Caron de Burgh, it has come a long way since its foundation back in 1980, with Janet Baldwin running the show. The modern GDRD is open for oboists and bassoonists of all ages and many of its regular participants return year after year: testament to the enjoyment of the day.

GDRD 2023 featured George Caird and Jarek Augustyniak as the respective oboe and bassoon masters, both leading excellent masterclasses – for beginners through to the most advanced players – throughout the day. These provoked equally positive responses from players and observers who were able to learn by listening to others. Both masters gave inspiring performances at the very end of the day with Jarek first presenting a collection of orchestral excerpts and George beautifully performing the first movement of Rubbra's *Oboe Sonata*.

Other features of the day included classes in reed-making for beginners,

Alexander technique and of course the wide array of trade stands, including Howarth and Crook & Staple among others. GDRD consistently programmes sessions that make the essential basics of double reed playing accessible to beginners and new amateurs, as well as providing challenging opportunities for the more advanced players with years of experience. This is most evident through the chamber music sessions towards the end of the day, where every participant is allocated a small group of like-ability players and an apt piece of chamber music corresponding to their collective ability. This is then rehearsed for an hour with a specialist oboe or bassoon tutor to perform to each other and any attending family members at the end of the day.

All this is in addition to the massed ensemble session which takes place every year, involving every oboist and bassoonist playing in three pieces together. These are specifically arranged to include beginner parts to accommodate the less experienced players, and easy transposed parts for children's bassoons in F or G. The specially-commissioned arrangement also featured three separate

contrabassoon parts! Double reed ensemble playing is always a highlight of the year and 2023 was no exception.

One of the most popular sessions of 2023 was the instrument trial session, giving anyone who was interested the chance to explore the extended family of double reeds. This year the session not only included the orchestral auxiliary instruments (cor anglais, oboe d'amore and contrabassoon) but historical instruments as well, following a brief talk on the history of the oboe and bassoon families. Understanding the roots of our instruments from their earliest ancestors is invaluable to the understanding of their modern counterparts: the oboists were fascinated by the shawm and baroque oboe, while the bassoonists were interested in the curtal/dulcian and baroque bassoon.

All considered, GDRD 2023 was as wonderful and important an event as its four decades of predecessors. The performances given by both the participants and the masters to mark the end of the day were, as ever, the perfect finale to a thoroughly enjoyable day of all things double reed.





# Chetham's School of Music Summer School 2023

Chetham's Summer School opened its doors again in August, this year collaborating with BDRS to promote inspiring progression opportunities for young musicians learning double reed instruments. Vicki Ciaputa, Creative Engagement Manager, explains and offers us her report on the event.



Chetham's Summer School orchestra rehearsal

We are extremely grateful to the British Double Reed Society who kindly funded a place at this year's Music Summer School for local bassoonist, Shaun.

Shaun's mum said: 'This experience would ordinarily be out of our reach, and I am so grateful to the BDRS for making this possible. Shaun fell in love with the bassoon when Trafford Music visited his primary school. I am excited for this to further develop his skill and passion.'



Stoller Hall

It was a pretty rainy week for Chetham's second annual Summer School, 31st July–5th August this year, but this typically Mancunian weather couldn't dampen the spirits of the 113 young people who participated. Taking advantage of Chetham's unique and beautiful site, participants occupied the medieval buildings as well as the state-of-the-art performance spaces, The Stoller Hall and Carole Nash Hall.

Across the three courses (orchestra, piano and vocal) participants assembled for mass singing every morning, Dalcroze and Alexander Technique classes, breath and posture workshops and chamber music, as well as a jam-packed schedule of social activities, including a treasure hunt, film night, cabaret and our famous paper-airplane competition.

Orchestral students enjoyed tutti rehearsals with Manchester-based conductor, Ellie Slorach, as well as detailed sectional rehearsals with professional teacher/musicians from Chetham's School of Music and RNCM, and the Hallé Orchestra, including our double reed team, Rachel Clegg (oboe) and Beth Davis (bassoon). The theme for this year's summer school repertoire was 'magic' and the programme certainly didn't disappoint, laced with movements from *Harry Potter*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Swan Lake*.

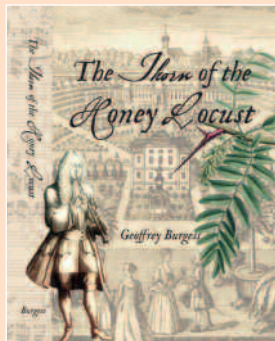
Summer School participants came from across the UK, and as far away as Abu Dhabi and Spain, to enjoy the week of high-quality music making. 25% of the participants this year received funding to enable them to attend Summer School, supporting their musical development and social opportunities in this challenging economic climate for families.

BDRS bursary recipient Shaun thoroughly appreciated the week of music making with new friends: 'I'm enjoying it [Summer School]. It's an experience I've not really done before. The longest I've been in an orchestra is over a weekend in my school. So yeah, it's quite fun!'

Chetham's Summer School will run again next year, 28th July–3rd August 2024, and full details can be found at [www.chethams.com](http://www.chethams.com)



## Book REVIEW



**The Thorn of the Honey Locust:  
The Chronicle of an Eighteenth-  
Century Musician**  
A Novel by Geoffrey Burgess  
ISBN 9798375170985  
Printed in Great Britain by Amazon

Being familiar with Geoffrey Burgess' exceptional and numerous scholarly writings on the oboe, I was enthused to read his self-published novel *The Thorn of the Honey Locust*,

particularly for its focus on the life of the oboist for whom JS Bach wrote much beautiful and challenging music. The book is dedicated to the memory of Bruce Haynes, baroque oboist and pioneer in the field of historically informed performance practice.

American professor and garden historian Mark Kirstenbaum arrives in Berlin to attend a conference. He is working on a book about Johann Gottlieb Gleditsch (1714–1786), a central figure in the evolution of botanical study, and he hopes to restore the Prussian Royal Academy Botanical Gardens to Gottlieb Gleditsch's design.

While a work of fiction, the novel's material is steeped in historical fact and imaginatively related. As though speaking for the author, the protagonist uses his conference speech to raise the subject of history and the importance of revealing its roots of inspiration, and of taking human, physical and intellectual experiences into account.

In the course of his library research, Mark is reminded of the honey locust tree (named *Gleditsia triacanthos* after Gleditsch), a recurring theme throughout the book. He finds unexpected references to famous eighteenth-century musicians, and the

disconcerting presence of a doctoral student looking at the same papers: Jeremy is researching Johann Caspar Gleditsch (1684–1747), musician and the father of Gottlieb. What transpires is their discovery of a life chronicle written by Caspar in 1741, and this comprises the substance of the novel.

Burgess creates an atmospheric depiction of Caspar's adventures, encounters and sojourns as the journeyman's musical advancement progresses throughout the course of his life. The reader gains an insight into court activity, and hot topics of the time such as the effects of coffee consumption, sensory capacity of plants, religious argument and national musical styles.

Gottlieb Gleditsch was appointed director of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Berlin. *The Thorn of the Honey Locust* speculates that Gottlieb's studies of the natural sciences causes a rift between him and his father. Interspersed with the fabled moralising memoirs of Caspar is Mark and Jeremy's storyline, their academic progress and burgeoning relationship.

At the end we find a map, family trees and lists of historical figures and musical works mentioned in the text, as well as several reference sources, all of which are highly recommended reading.

The recounted struggles and achievements of a double reed player, and the palpable thrill of fresh discovery emanate from Burgess' experience both as a performing artist (oh, the humiliation of squeaking!) and avid researcher. As investigation involves inevitable incompletions and uncertainties, there remains some final ambiguity; however, honey locusts are in full bloom as backdrop for a modern reunion, and the circumstance that a honey locust tree was planted at the grave of Gottlieb Gleditsch is a conclusive truth!

Jane Downer

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The BDRS acts as a national forum for debate and the exchange of ideas, information and advice on all aspects of double reed instruments.

It also fulfils an important role in encouraging greater interest in the instruments, and securing their place in the wider cultural and educational environment.

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