

Director's Activity Report to Friends of CYM AGM
November 2008

Since I last reported to the Friends on November 17th 2007 there has been much to report in a busy year.

December

In this rather short month for activity, an excellent end of calendar year concert was given by the newly formed CYM Choral Society involving students, parents, tutors (and the Director), singing Vaughan Williams' Fantasia on Christmas Carols. Other items in the programme included the Chamber Orchestra playing a movement of Beethoven's 6th Symphony together with items from younger players. The term finished for pupils on December 8th.

The LSSO rehearsed with Peter Ash from the 27th – 30th December in preparation for meeting Sir Richard Armstrong in the New Year. The programme was "Jealousy" – Janacek, "Horn Concerto No 1" – Strauss and "Symphony No 6" – Dvorak.

January

The LSSO kicked off the New Year with an excellent concert at the Barbican. The concert was reviewed in the Independent as follows -:

London Schools Symphony Orchestra/Amstrong, Barbican, London *****
Reviewed by Michael Church

Published: 10 January 2008

The significance of a youth orchestra lies less in its achievement, than in what it portends for the future – and in what it says about the climate in which its playing has developed. We currently have two global benchmarks against which all youth orchestras should be measured.

Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra is recruited from both sides of the Arab-Israeli divide; Gustavo Dudamel's Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra comes from the poorest parts of Venezuela. Although Barenboim's band is impressive, it is Dudamel's that leaves London critics speechless with admiration.

Britain's two leading youth orchestras have just taken the stage. At the Roundhouse, we heard the National Youth Orchestra: aged 13 to 19, and with a distinction in Grade 8 as the entry qualification, the players must meet stiff technical requirements.

Yet how dull their concert was: they could play all the notes in some demanding music – interludes from Britten's Peter Grimes, and Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet – but there was no flicker of the beauty and excitement latent in these works. The Roundhouse acoustic didn't help, but the real problem lay in Scottish composer James MacMillan's puddingy presence on the podium.

The visibly younger London Schools Symphony Orchestra had assistance from a better acoustic at the Barbican, but the exhilarating fizz they produced in Janacek, Strauss and Dvorak was, at least in part, because they had an inspirational conductor in Sir Richard Armstrong.

From its first explosive notes, the terse sound-drama of Janacek's "Jealousy" sprang vividly to life. And as the orchestra laid out the terrain for soloist Stephen Stirling in Strauss's Horn Concerto No 1 – and provided a rich underpinning for him – one felt in good hands. The strings had expressive warmth, and the woodwind textures were fastidiously calibrated, as they were in the final work, Dvorak's Symphony No 6. There were some glorious moments in the Adagio, and the Scherzo lived up to its subtitle, "Furiant". The finale had rough edges, but it was filled with a bounding, joyful energy. In sum, our kids can do it, too – provided they have leadership and ambition.

FYM Trustee Nico Lethbridge's memorial service was held in St.Alfega Church, Greenwich on 17th of the month. In addition to myself, CYM was represented by Chris Crowcroft (Chair, CYM Board) and Peter Ash (Artistic Director LSSO) whilst representing the Foundation were Bridget Sime (Director of Fundraising, FYM) and Sir Bob Reid (Chair, FYM). A congregation of some 600 friends and colleagues gathered to hear wonderful music and moving tributes.

February

Perhaps the highlight of the month of February was the visit of the CYM senior string quartet to the International Festival of Young String Quartets at Chethams School of Music in Manchester. I am grateful to the Friends of CYM who covered the bulk of the accommodation and travel costs for the quartet, and to tutor Andrew McGee who attended without a fee qu. "because I want to support the four young players". Andrew himself is recognised as one of this country's leading violinists and viola players and we are fortunate to have him as one of our most distinguished tutors. Suffice it to say here that our players compared very favourably with quartets from the specialist Music Schools and Junior Departments of the Conservatoires – so much so, that Chethams have invited our quartet to join their Chamber Orchestra in a performance of the Vaughan Williams Concerto Grosso at the MDS "Excellent" Festival at Sadlers Wells in July.

Also in February, the very fine London Youth Wind Band directed by Geoffrey Harniess gave an excellent concert at St. John's Waterloo performing an eclectic repertoire of Gershwin, Bernstein, De Souza and Lloyd and featuring the very fine pianist Timothy Carey.

March

The CYM Annual showpiece concert was given at St.Alfega Church, Greenwich on March 16th to a full and enthusiastic audience. "Jack Petchey Foundation" award winners were presented at the concert, including the leadership award this year given to accompanist Peter Croser after a vote amongst tutors, parents and colleagues. Peter has invested his £1,000 award in our bursary scheme and has made arrangements to continue his benefaction in subsequent years from private resources. This is the sort of story that rarely makes the headlines, but such generosity is surely worthy of mention here.

The concert itself started with Massiano's thrilling antiphonal "Canzona Trigesmaquinta" for Brass, followed by Peter Birkby's "African Drums" and

Mancini's "Solo for Drum Set and Percussion Ensemble". Next was "Smokin' Guns" by Gus Haverkate for recorders and the "Capriol Suite" arranged for guitar ensemble. Finally in the first half, the first movement of Poulenc's "Sextet for Piano and Wind Quintet" was performed. The second half saw Hannah Sutcliffe (now awarded a place at Guildhall) playing the first movement of the Mozart's G major Violin Concerto with the CYM Chamber Orchestra - and the concert finished with me conducting the CYM Chamber Choir, Choral Society, soloists and Orchestra in a performance of Vivaldi's "Gloria".

The standard of student performance throughout this concert was of the highest quality. This reflects not just the achievements of our students, but also the high quality of training offered by a talented and motivated staff. This was a concert to be justly proud of judged by the highest standards anywhere in the country.

I would like to pay tribute to the work of Philip Meaden (Principal, Morley College and CYM Board Member) who attended his last CYM Board Meeting in March before taking up his new post as Principal of Leeds College of Music in April. Philip has been a good friend to CYM during his stewardship of Morley College and whilst on the Board, he was both helpful and constructively challenging. We would all miss Philip and, on behalf of all my colleagues, I wished him and his wife well for the future at the meeting.

April

The strange Easter Holidays (no-one could seem to agree a conformity of dates) made the LSSO Holiday Course tricky. But we managed and the Orchestra gave a superb performance under the baton of Nicholas Kraemer with guests the Dante Quartet at the Barbican on the 22nd. The programme of Britten "Sinfonia da Requiem", Vaughan Williams "Fantasia on a theme of Thomas Tallis" and the "Enigma Variations" by Elgar gave a very English flavour on St. Georges Day. A review also appeared in UPBEAT magazine. The LSSO goes from strength to strength giving performances of which many professional orchestras would be proud.

Also in April we learned that three CYM groups had got through to the Music for Youth Finals in Birmingham. The successful groups were the Piano and Wind Sextet, the CYM Symphony Orchestra and the Senior Percussion Ensemble. Although we accepted the invitations for the smaller groups who were to perform mid week, we had to decline the invitation for the Symphony Orchestra, asked to perform on our last Saturday of the Academic Year. To attend would have driven a coach and horses through our "last day" schedule with nearly a quarter of the Centre away. Moving 100 players to Birmingham also had its logistical and financial problems to meet, but it was the disruption of a special day at Morley (leaver's concert and all) which made the decision for us.

In April we also learned that the Sextet and a CYM Piano Trio won their respective classes at the Croydon Music Festival.

May

15 cello students attended a seminar given by the Endymion Ensemble at the Centre and a special harp day was organised in conjunction with Morley (no connection) Harps. Head of Guitar Tim Pells gave a wonderful workshop with cellist Sylvia Mann and virtuoso violinist Nona Liddell visited a lunchtime recital.

We have also made stronger links with the Southbank Centre. This included an excellent workshop on Messiaen's "Quartet for the End of Time" with the Borlotti – Buttoni Trust winners – who were soon to appear with Mitsuoko Uchida at the RFH. Other projects planned include orchestral, chamber music, gamelan and singer songwriter connections with resident groups at the SBC.

Ela Pietrowska has been appointed Principal of Morley College in succession to Philip Meaden. Sebastian Scotney was appointed a member of the Board. Claire Wright and Ruth Jenkins (FCYM) were appointed Trustees of the Foundation for Young Musicians.

I was delighted to announce that senior officers from the Government's Music and Dance Scheme awarded CYM an extra 5 scholarships for the following Academic Year. That means that our total number of scholarship holders within our new status as a national Centre of Advanced Training would be 30 rather than the originally offered 25. This showed further confidence in our service from government departments at the DCSF and the DCMS.

Katie Sudlow and Helen Edwards

We were sorry to say farewell to Katie at the end of the Spring term. Katie distinguished herself with us in her time as Administrator and PA to the Management Team. We wished her every success as she completed her course in Cultural Management at the City University and only last month (October 08), I was delighted to learn that she had joined Philip Meaden at Leeds College of Music having been appointed Knowledge Transfer Manager.

We welcomed Helen Edwards as her successor. Helen, an ex CYM and LSSO student, has done an excellent job since she joined us.

June

On June 19th, the CYM Intermediate Orchestra featured in the Spitalfields Festival playing a Slavonic Dance by Dvorak and a new commission "Above the clouds" written by Shu Wang a postgraduate composition student at the Royal Academy of Music. The new work was a real challenge for these young players and they acquitted themselves admirably.

Louise Vane was appointed the new CYM tutor with responsibility for Music at Johanna Primary School on June 12th. The previous incumbent resigned her position after long-term illness. Readers may remember that part of our obligation under

contract to the school is to provide a music specialist one day per week in return for pepper corn rent for our Saturday usage by the CYM percussion department.

Further meetings were held with the HUB in relation to our contract with the DCSF into the quality and scope of provision for "Music Of Other Genres" (Jazz, World, Folk) in the capital and to tie up loose ends before the final report is released.

The Annual Percussion Concert was held in Johanna School on the 28th June with the now traditional interval barbeque in the playground. This concert demonstrated the richness and diversity of the department in which all members participated. A highlight was certainly the virtuosic solo marimba playing of Fergus Brennan. Fergus now has a place at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

July

Two CYM groups out of the three invited (see earlier) were "highly commended" in the Music for Youth finals in Birmingham on the 8th July and 11th July.

The Louis Watt Memorial Competition was held at Morley (Judge - Gillian Moore Head of Contemporary Culture at the Southbank Centre) on 5th July and from a highly talented field, Joshua Hayward (viola) won the coveted award with a superb rendition of the Walton - Viola Concerto. Joshua is just 16 and has another two years with us, a real talent.

The Leavers Concert was held in St. Peter's Church Vauxhall on 12th July. This concert was remarkable not only for the excellent playing of the Dance Band and Symphony Orchestra, together with fine singing from the Chamber Choir, but also for the inaugural performances of both CYM Gamelan Groups. The ensembles played a prepared piece as well as an improvisation, and captivated the audience with sounds of Indonesia in the generous acoustics of the church. Both groups deserve special praise for what they had achieved in their first year of learning at the South Bank Centre as part of their Saturday curriculum. As has now become the norm, we enjoyed a social gathering after the concert saying farewell to many students as they prepared for life after CYM - at University, Music College and elsewhere.

The CYM string department was also busy on 15th July, renewing an association with Chethams School of Music in Manchester. At their invitation, one of our quartets joined the Chethams String Orchestra in a performance of Vaughan Williams' Concerto Grosso at the "Excellent Festival", a showcase for all the National Music and Dance Scheme "Centres of Advanced Training" institutions at Sadlers Wells Theatre. This Festival was genuinely the very best musicians and dancers participating in the national scheme. Standards were of a professional nature and the collaborations on view something we all wish to continue. An example, other than our own with Chethams, was the Royal Ballet School dancing to the accompaniment of the Yehudi Menuhin String Orchestra in a piece composed and choreographed by a student in each school.

In the intervening weeks before the beginning of the new academic year, the Centre was busy with an imaginative and stimulating Open Access Holiday Course at St. Saviours and St. Olaves School led by Francesca Hanley and the London Youth Wind

Band, directed by Geoff Harniess, toured in Germany before giving an excellent concert in St. James's Church, Piccadilly on the 25th July. I then joined the LSSO on a highly successful tour of Spain and Portugal in late July /early August, playing to packed audiences in the magnificent settings of the Basilica de San Juan de Dios in Granada, the beautiful cloistered courtyard of the historic University in Osuna (now an annexe of the University of Seville), El Centro Cultural de la Villa in Seville, and the hugely impressive Basilica del Palacio Real in Mafra, just outside Lisbon. The programme of Rimsky Korsakov, Strauss and Tchaikovsky they performed so magnificently in these very different settings (a concert hall, an outdoor venue and two basilicas, all providing different acoustic challenges) was to be repeated in the Barbican on September 23rd under the baton of Peter Ash, with the distinguished soprano Joan Rodgers as the soloist in the Strauss - "Four Last Songs". Both the LSSO and the LYWB, as well as giving high quality concerts, were excellent ambassadors for CYM and for London and UK young people abroad. The Jack Petchey Foundation generously supported the LSSO tour in the form of student bursaries for which we were very thankful.

September

The first day of the new term, 20th September, was an Induction Day for new students, and a welcome back to those returning for another year. In a departure from normal timetabled activity, students were involved in either "Beat Boxing" with "Shlomo" and "Bellatrix" from "All From The Mouth", reed making workshops led by Helen Scarborough (oboe) and Stuart Russell (bassoon), or were involved in the first rehearsal for the Primary Prom at the Royal Albert Hall on the 20th and 21st of October featuring the enhanced CYM Chamber Orchestra, Senior Brass, Jazz Group, Saxophone Ensemble and the London Youth Wind Band.

The LSSO gave an excellent concert in the Barbican on 23rd September, repeating the Iberian Tour programme. As significant as the quality of performance to a very good audience (including 500 pupils on our free ticketing scheme, thanks to Bird & Bird's renewed support) was the huge turn out of City of London Corporation Members (LSSO sponsors) at both the reception and the concert.

Thanks to a generous donation from the Haberdashers' Company, three new pianos have arrived on CYM sites. We are extremely grateful to all our benefactors, and this recent act of generosity has started to address our intent to upgrade the quality of pianos at the Centre across the two main sites.

October

The enhanced CYM Chamber Orchestra, Senior Brass, Jazz Group, Saxophone Ensemble and the London Youth Wind Band gave excellent performances at the Primary Schools Proms to packed Albert Hall audiences on 20th and 21st of the month.

Finally

This time last year I advised that -:"after seventeen post ILEA years, it is not surprising that they (Westminster) may wish to review their position." Now eighteen years on, Westminster have made clear that this will be their last Academic |Year as

Lead Borough for the Centre. Any Lead Organisation will have to be in place at the latest by September 1st 2009. Negotiations with a successor are well advanced though not yet signed and sealed but all should become clearer by the New Year.

I am delighted to report that Bridget Sime, Director of Fundraising for the Foundation of Young Musicians (FYM), was able to pass across to CYM the amounts targeted in the CYM budget 2007/08 for central costs, bursaries, instruments, tutor apprentice schemes etc, and is on target to raise the funding required for the current financial year – no mean feat in the current climate.

I would like to thank all my colleagues for their continued support throughout the year and pay tribute to their work. I am also delighted to report on a year which shows so much activity of exceptional high quality, and to congratulate our talented students on their achievement.

Crucial in the strong team which is CYM, are the Friends (FCYM), and I am indebted to Nicy Roberts (Chair FCYM) and her committee, and all the parent volunteers for the excellent work they do week in week out to assist us. There is invaluable financial support, the running of the canteen, office support at busy times, the Friends Guide, the loaning of aural training books, ticket selling, stewarding, the book and sheet music stall together with other merchandising. Your work is most appreciated. Thank you.

Stephen Dagg,
Director, CYM

November, 2008