



### *Some Musical Reflections:*

Before moving to Aberdeen, I taught in one town and surrounding villages for nearly twenty years, giving rise to some reflection on the years there. Some of my teaching was in local schools, some at home. I've had one to one, pairs and groups, from ages 5 to 89. All individuals, they taught me at least as much they have learned. Here are just a few of them.

A&A were mirror image twins and the most important thing to them was that I could tell them apart, unlike their class teachers who had thirty children to get to know. They had complementary ways of learning, one very much into learning by rote, and the other more interested in form and improvisation. Violin lessons were the one activity they did together, but they didn't necessarily want to practise together, so we played most music in duet form, switching parts. It was fun making duet arrangements of pretty much everything, bringing in some improvisation to their playing from the start. I suspected violin would soon get lost in the busyness of upper secondary school, but they enjoyed their playing, and I enjoyed developing the lessons to their particular circumstances.

B had a very physical response to music: she was the child of a professional dancer. The difference between dance and instrumental learning models was pertinent. She was great at learning by ear, but didn't enjoy improvising. The more self-motivated model of learning was a challenge, partly because immersion in a dance class is easier than trying to carve out a bit of time at home to think about the violin. And having learned dance by lots of repetition, the processing of printed music did not come naturally. But her playing had lots

of free, rhythmic movement, and she loved dancing then playing a polka, with the eventual aim of doing both simultaneously!

C was utterly charming and worked hard in the lessons. But he only started because his mother wanted him to play, having not had the opportunity herself. Really he was interested in football, and very little else. So I used sport similes, taught him the Match of the Day theme tune, and got him to explain things to me in his terms, which was always enlightening. He would learn music from his home country, to play to his grandparents over skype, so we did as much as I could find. Joining an ensemble awakened his competitive spirit and gave him a reason to take notice of rhythm and pulse, something he hadn't done previously. He lost confidence a bit when his younger brother started learning, catching up fast with the family competitiveness. So we tried viola, and he loved it, found switching to the alto clef easy (because he's bilingual? loves coding?), and joining a more advanced ensemble.

D was absolutely fantastically musical by ear, but goodness, did she struggle to read music. The solution was to work through some Bartok duets, which are wonderfully unpredictable at times, so she actually had to read the dots. She was also a huge fan of musicals, so we plotted the differences between live performances (on You Tube) and the printed arrangements. As a young carer, she didn't get to every lesson but they were important to her and we found workarounds over the years. She came often with little practice done, but with plenty of ideas, often a new song which she wanted to play to me on her phone so we could work out how to do it. They were not conventional lessons, but a very creative, collaborative process involving lots of theory and improvisation. I felt I had to consult with her parents since she wasn't going to end up with lots of exam certificates for all their money, but they were happy with it.

E read music better than words. She was expressive & imaginative, and an energising student who was full of ideas. She had developed tenacity in response to severe dyslexia and was delighted with small progress, as were her parents. She was not aiming to be a professional, but to enjoy playing what she could in the school orchestra, and express her ideas in music. She had a very low speaking voice, and it took about two minutes of a trial lesson for her to notice the sound of the low C string (I teach on a 5 string fiddle combining the strings of both violin and viola), and identify as a viola player wholeheartedly. It took me a lot longer to discover that she could hardly practise at home because a) she shared a room with a teenage sister who was trying to study, and b) every time she started playing, the family dog started howling. The solution was to practise while her sister took the dog for its walk.

F was promising enough to become a professional, if she wanted to (she actually wanted to be a diplomat). She was also good at everything else she did, so fitting in practice alongside rowing, A Levels, DofE and a Saturday job was seriously challenging. She set me off looking up synaesthesia: I asked her for her impressions when playing to her with her eyes shut; her answer was a whole stream of colours. She had an instinctive understanding of musical concepts that are difficult to teach. But she also had impaired hearing. She couldn't actually hear rain fall, but could play perfectly in tune. Determined and independent, she preferred to be thought inattentive than admit a problem, but over the 11 years I taught her, she came to trust me and I came to understand her.

G was one of my adult students, and became a friend. A lifelong amateur violinist, she only took up the viola ten years ago, at the age of 80 (that's not a typo!). The most motivated of students, she put in a great deal of effort into a short practice time (she had a lot of interests!) and felt if she only concentrated hard enough she should be able to master the tricky bits, which often resulted in tension. So we worked on analysing just why that passage was hard, left hand vs right hand, how many keys it passed through, where we could find a study that would address the technical issue. She played in a good amateur orchestra as well as taking chamber music courses and was in short an example to aspire to!

Where possible I got my students to play together. Developing a group identity as an ensemble improved their playing more than anything else. It cut across age groups, and having older ones coaching younger ones accelerated everyone's progress and made new connections in the normally vertical hierarchy of schools. We all enjoyed the collective resonance of a dozen small violins, doing coaching and constructive feedback with each other, polishing performance skills. We tied in with primary school projects and joined in cabarets. For me it was a great opportunity to write personalised arrangements, to challenge and get the best out of each individual. Sometimes those individuals I thought I knew turned out to be very different in an ensemble.

In conclusion, my evolution as a teacher over the last two decades was entirely down to my students and their individuality. Their desire to learn developed my skills and knowledge, and gave me the motivation to get regular vocational training. Some I taught for well over half their lives; continuity from age 6 to 17 in an educational context is rare. It was hard to leave them behind, but I'm now enjoying meeting new pupils and relishing a different set of musical challenges in my new home, with the foundation of that experience.

Alison

As the Spring Term tends to inflict the worst wintry weather on us, I thought that the following lines might be of interest just now. They were written last year, after a particularly heavy snowfall which blocked country roads, and were submitted to Upbeat but disappeared mysteriously, presumably lost in a deep drift. Keen readers will note references to the concert programme which we were rehearsing at the time.

### **March Snowfall in the Wilderness of Clatt**

In the district of the Garioch  
 Where the weather's cold and dreary  
 Lies the neighbourhood of Clatt —  
 Nowhere's more remote than that.  
 Now Clatt's most famous resident,  
 The Orpheus Choir President,  
 Was kept indoors one practice night  
 By snow and ice. O woeful plight!  
 To brave the storm and sink in snow—  
 Should Moira try it? Roy said “NO!”  
     “I'll have to stay at home — O drat!  
     Within the wilderness of Clatt”.

In spite of such a sad reversal  
 Moira held her own rehearsal.  
 First she sang 'Magnificat'  
 In giant mitts and woolly hat.  
 From Auchnagatt to Tomintoul  
 They heard her in that weather foul.  
 It's said they heard her 'Lay a Garland'  
 All the way from Inch to Tarland.  
 Then the Ballade to the Moon;  
 As always, it was bang in tune.  
 Next from her snowy dwelling-place  
 She bravely crooned 'Amazing Grace'.  
 They heard her trilling 'Homeward Bound',  
 Then whoops! She hit the frozen ground.  
     There's such a risk of falling splat  
     Within the wilderness of Clatt.

Keep your lamps burning, Moira dear!  
 We'll see you when the roads are clear,  
 When the earth moves (beneath your skis),  
 When apple blossom scents the breeze.  
 When bluetits flit from tree to tree,  
 Then welcome back to AOC  
 And leave your charming habitat  
 Within the fragrant vale of Clatt.

Erika



Many years ago, I was a member of a Choral Society that auditioned successfully to participate, with other choirs, in a performance of Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* in a Promenade Concert in the Albert Hall, London.

To prepare for this event we had to forego the Summer Break in order to learn and rehearse the work, then participate in two joint rehearsals with the other choirs under a foremost chorus master, in the BBC Maida Vale Studios, then finally a full rehearsal with conductor and orchestra in the Albert Hall on the afternoon of the event, followed by the evening performance.

During the final rehearsal a young man arrived late and took a vacant seat just in front of me. After a short time he turned round and said to me, "You're flat!" This I ignored.

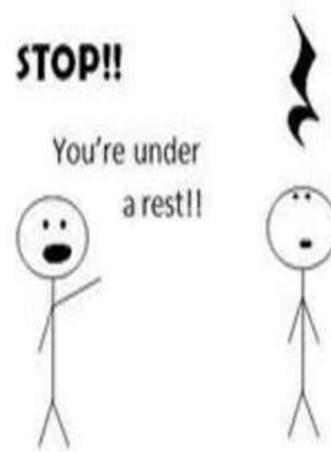
Soon after he turned round again and in some annoyance said, "You're flat!!", to which I replied, "You're sharp!"

Soon after he turned round yet again and, in considerable annoyance said, "You're flat!!!", to which I replied, "Oh, push off!"

We then had a 'comfort break' and when we re-assembled, I observed that the young man had indeed taken my advice and 'pushed off'. He had, in fact 'pushed off' and taken his place with the BBC Singers; that select group of top-flight professionals, who were located in the middle of the massed choirs and were there to ensure that the performance did not falter and also to provide some quality of vocal sound.

So, I suppose I must have been flat, and probably still am.

David



Where do you like to practice?

Perhaps you are fortunate enough to have a music room where you can sit at a piano and go over the twiddly bits, or prefer a seat in your conservatory with a handy cup of coffee to lubricate the vocal chords or perhaps you like nothing better than a CD in the car providing great entertainment for those drawing up beside you at traffic lights as you belt out our latest Mozart or Rutter carol? (Lucky fellow driver!).

This is my favourite place to practice – an almost empty 7.52am LNER train from Aberdeen to Darlington. I had as you can see, a table to myself – well perhaps a whole carriage! – had availed of myself of a railway cup of coffee with plenty of milk and had settled down with headphones to listen and mouth my way through all the bits that I was still finding tricky in the middle of November. You will be glad to know that I do not sing out loud although I think it must look pretty strange to be sitting along a carriage from a person who appears to be singing but no words are coming out! I was having a delightful time when the guard appeared to check my tickets. He glanced down at my

music and seeing that I was practising the German piece for Christmas enquired how long I had spoken German. I confessed immediately that I hadn't a clue and asked, somewhat jokingly if he spoke German because I needed a translation. He immediately translated it for me being fluent in both German and English. My opinion of the average guard of LNER is now even higher than it was before! Do you think they might have one who knows Norwegian or is a dab hand at Latin?

I practiced away until Kirkaldy when I was joined by three retired ladies who were too entertaining to ignore and warmly included me in all their hilarity. So if you are driven mad by builders next door or can't practice because your other half keeps popping in to chat, there's always the 7.52 LNER to Stonehaven. See you there!

Janice



### Slimy Limerick

There was a young man from Dunottar  
Who larded his tonsils with butter  
And now when he snores  
Instead of the roars  
Comes a soft, oleaginous mutter

**OCCUPATIONS**

eg. SHAKE MORE ..... SHOEMAKER Name: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1. DOWN CLEAR WINE (6,7) .....
- 2. CLEANED MARK (11) .....
- 3. I CUE TO EARN (10) .....
- 4. A GREEN SEAT MAT (6,7) .....
- 5. MY SHEEP WINCE (7,5) .....
- 6. TO ROCK KERBS (11) .....
- 7. CENTRE PAR (9) .....
- 8. HER SUPER LOT (11) .....
- 9. HER CHOCOLATES (13) .....
- 10. BLOT A FAMINE (11) .....
- 11. I SORT COIL (9) .....
- 12. LARGE ROOTS (10) .....
- 13. BROKEN WRAP (10) .....
- 14. ONE NICE CROFT (12) .....
- 15. WE RAID RATS (3,7) .....
- 16. GREEN ROUTES (4,7) .....
- 17. CHEER TO CALM (11) .....
- 18. THE CLASSROOM (12) .....
- 19. A CREAM DIP (9) .....
- 20. A MERRY FUR PLOT (7,6) .....
- 21. PAIR DRAG HERO (12) .....
- 22. VAST MANNER (10) .....
- 23. ELM WARRANT (10) .....
- 24. LOSE CITY GONG (12) .....
- 25. EARN MOST (8) .....
- 26. LINKED NAME (6,4) .....
- 27. RIP IDLE BUSH (4,7) .....
- 28. SEND A DANGER PARCEL (9,8) .....
- 29. SEEK PURE HOE (11) .....
- 30. ONE TON MASS (10) .....

Return to MOIRA by 26<sup>th</sup> Feb. Small prize for 1<sup>st</sup> correct entry drawn out of hat!

New Music for a New year – only 18 rehearsals until our first concert – well a few less by the time you read this! The time will fly by – already our local Co-op has Chocolate Bunnies, Mini eggs and iced or plain Hot Cross Buns on the shelves. Easter is in April this year, I think, so why must they have these products out so early! Nothing seems to be in its correct season anymore.

I do hope that the horrible throat/chest virus will soon leave us and that we avoid the many viruses that seem to hit the choir around 'Concert Time'. It would be great to have a full turnout for our May concerts.

If you know of anyone who would like to join us, why not bring them along some Wednesday for a 'taster' session and then Jane can arrange an audition. She would like a few more male voices to add to the excellent sound our basses and tenors make as it is 14 voices against 35 altos and sopranos!

For new members the practice page can be found at [www.aoc.org.uk/practice](http://www.aoc.org.uk/practice) and is a tremendously helpful resource in learning our separate parts. We are all grateful to Graeme for the work he puts in compiling this and to Gordon for producing individual CDs.

It looks like a very interesting programme so, Happy Singing,

Moira January 2020

## **ORPHEUS CHOIR**

## **Diary Dates For Session Jan – June 2020**

- Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> Feb** -- **Fish Tea and Bingo** at The Ashvale 7.00pm for 7.15pm .  
Price £15 per head
- Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May** -- **Rehearsal** in Mannofield Church 2.00 -5.00pm.  
Bring your own refreshments.
- Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> May** -- **Concert** at Skene Parish Church. 6.30pm for quick rehearsal.
- Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> May** -- **Concert** at Cults Parish Church. 1.30pm for rehearsal.
- Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> May** -- **Rehearsal** in Crown Terrace. 7.15 – 9.30pm.
- Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> May** -- **Concert** in Mannofield Church. 6.30pm for rehearsal.
- Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June** -- **Choir AGM** in Rubislaw Church Centre at 7.00pm