



NEWSLETTER No. 46

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Chairman's Notes
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Merry Christmas!

We are fortunate this year that the date for our Family Concert is much nearer Christmas and the occasion therefore has a genuine Festive Flavour. Our carols are special arrangements by Robert Ramskill who regularly plays keyboard with the WSO. *Unto us is Born a Son* was specially commissioned for BBC 'Songs of Praise' and *Good King Wenceslas* has also been performed on that programme.

The WSO is very grateful to Daphne Hinton for her generous support of the December Family Concert and we wish her and all our other supporters a very Happy Christmas!

Verdi Requiem

The performance on 7 November was a great success and given to a capacity audience. There were over 200 participants and the choirs, soloists and orchestra gave a memorable performance under Nigel Stark

WSO Dinner

The annual dinner for WSO members, supporters and friends will be held at Kenilworth Golf Club on Friday 22 January. Full details are available via me.

ORDER YOUR TICKETS NOW!

From, Ticket Secretary,
Mrs. Diana Billington,
on 01926 850385,
or by writing to her at
21, Fishponds Road,
Kenilworth. CV8 1EX,
or by e-mail at
boxoffice@wso.org.uk

Revolutionary Road

Saturday 6 March at 7.30 pm
Guy Nelson Hall, Warwick

The WSO will be at maximum strength for its first ever performance of Shostakovich's *Symphony No 12* at the Guy Nelson Hall on Saturday 6th March 2010 at 7.30pm. Shostakovich composed this work in 1961 and subtitled it *The Year 1917*, dedicating it to Vladimir Lenin, leader of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution. It was premiered in Moscow by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra under Yevgeny Mravinsky and is scored for large orchestra including triple woodwind and 6 percussionists. Shostakovich had first thought of writing a symphony in praise of Lenin in the early nineteen thirties but his difficulties during the Stalinist régime meant that the idea had to be shelved until much later. By 1959 he was thinking of it again and soon afterwards began work on it. Progress was further slowed because he fell and broke his leg, subsequently in 1967 he wrote in a letter. "Target achieved so far: 75% [right leg broken, left leg broken, right hand defective. All I need to do now is to wreck my left hand and then 100% of my extremities will be out of order." The symphony was well received in Russia but only after the Cold War had ended did it gain recognition and appreciation in the West.

The concert begins its 'Revolutionary Road' with what is perhaps Beethoven's most famous overture, *Egmont*, completed in 1810 as part of the incidental music to a play by Goethe. The play tells of the heroism of Count Egmont a 16th Century Flemish nobleman who led a rising against Spanish Despotism. Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No 4*, written in 1805, which concludes the first half of the concert is revolutionary in an entirely different way. It breaks with the tradition of the earlier concertos in that the piano is no



Philip Martin

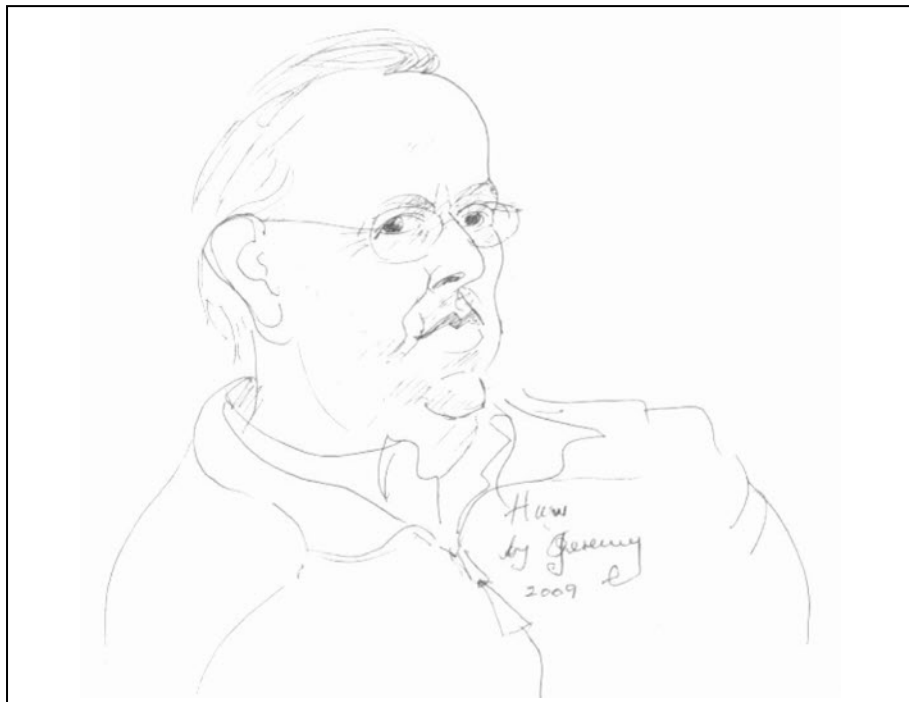
longer the hero of all proceedings but must share stage with the orchestra and is more of a partner than a virtuoso of display. The soloist, international pianist and composer, Philip Martin, makes a welcome return to the WSO. He has performed at the Royal Albert Hall Promenade Concerts and more recently premiered his own third piano concerto in his native Dublin with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland.

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A Welshman Proud of the Wooden Spoon!

A profile of Huw Thomas WSO Timpanist



Born in South Wales but spending most of his early life in Aberystwyth, Huw Thomas, having clashed cymbals at the age of six, began serious percussion when he was offered the opportunity some 5 years later. His solo baptism was in Rossini's *Thieving Magpie Overture* at the age of 12 with the County Youth Orchestra when he recalls that his knees knocked as fast as his roll on the side drum. As a young percussionist he had plenty of playing opportunities: the School Orchestra, County Youth Orchestra, Three Counties Orchestra, summer music college in Harlech and the National Youth Orchestra of Wales as well as Philomusica of Aberystwyth. Philomusica, like the WSO, had a conductor who seemed able to persuade world-famous personalities and soloists to perform with the Orchestra. Johnny Morris came to do *Ting Tang the Elephant* and *Juanita the Spanish Lobster* - it was *Juanita the Cardigan Bay Lobster* then. Richard Baker narrated *Peter and the Wolf*, and the list of soloists for concertos was impressive.

Huw met his wife Chris when they both played Beethoven 9 in the Great Hall in Aberystwyth, she was banging the bass drum. In Huw's words, "Something clicked, and they banged and rolled together for many years." Having survived being shot when she played the floor polisher in Malcolm Arnold's *Grand Overture*, Chris found

work in the Midlands and dragged Huw away from his native Wales. That didn't curtail the percussion playing - it blossomed, just as the romance had done. Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra and the WSO were good places to kick-start the contacts book, and before long, Huw was playing with Leamington Chamber, Beauchamp Sinfonietta, Gloucestershire SO and Sinfonia of Birmingham. Chris' playing stopped when Ben arrived 23 years ago and David some 10 years later but she has continued her work with the Environment Agency and is Chair of the local school governors. Huw's day job in central Birmingham is connected with the mortgage industry and as he says he needs it to finance his passion for both playing and acquiring instruments. To most people a garage is where a car might be kept but for Huw it's the home for many of his 200 or so instruments ranging from triangle to tam tam and timpani, many of which he has to transport from concert to concert in his purpose built trailer - piccolo players eat your heart out!

Huw says that part of the reason why he plays with so many groups is that he needs the practice and in deference to the neighbours, he resists the temptation to practice at home. Occasionally colleagues in the WSO venture to give him the impression that he might be playing too loud. His response to that is to invite them to attend one of the

firework concerts that he plays in every summer: 134 cannon to accompany Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* and Beethoven's *Wellington's Victory* in the 'Battle Proms'. Given such a complicated existence at the back of the orchestra there have been interesting moments. Huw recalls a performance of Mendelssohn's *Symphony No.1* in Tuscany, where, unable to locate his drum sticks he played the first movement with wooden spoons. As the professional conductor, a timpani fanatic, didn't notice the difference, Huw mused over whether ever again to buy sticks costing £70 a pair. Perhaps the spoons were of exceptional quality in Italy.

He played in the first musical event in the Birmingham National Indoor Arena - *Aida* - with Yuri Simonov, the conductor, singing the tenor arias in Russian from the podium in the dress rehearsal in front of at least 5,000 invited friends and family of the cast. There have been musical highs in a baroque church in Florence, in the brass band finals in the Royal Albert Hall, and many more.

When asked how he copes with the sitting around at rehearsals and concerts between stress-inducing, exposed entries while the strings and woodwind work full time, "That's easy," is his self-effacing reply. "I once tried playing the viola - it was too hard finding the right notes, reading an odd clef, perfecting the bowing and doing it in time with others!" He does admit to having crashed in with some spectacular entries in the wrong place during his 40 years of playing, but adds that there is nothing to beat the adrenaline rush and the feeling of satisfaction when all the orchestra "plays out of its skin and the piece works."

Beyond the Stave!

Johannes Brahms and Johann Strauss II became firm friends. Allegedly at their first meeting Strauss asked Brahms if he would do him the honour of signing his autograph book. Brahms neatly penned the opening bars of Strauss' waltz, *The Blue Danube*, and underneath wrote: 'Unfortunately not by Johannes Brahms'