



NEWSLETTER No. 52

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Chairman's Notes
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2011-12 Brochure

Next season's brochure of programmes is hot off the press and can be collected following the June concert. There are five subscription concerts next year and supporters can save £2 per concert by completing the enrolment form which is available from Di Billington, the ticket secretary, and on display at the June concert. There are three concerts in the Guy Nelson Hall and two in St Mary's Church Warwick. Our soloists include Ruth Palmer who will play the Barber violin concerto and Thomas Corns the Poulenc organ concerto.

Don Juan at the CBSO Centre

On Sunday 15 May the WSO enjoyed a new experience at the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra Centre in Birmingham. Some 60 players attended a 'Play Day' organised by WSO secretary, Raymond Joyce, and rehearsed *Don Juan* by Richard Strauss and *Capriccio Italien* by Tchaikovsky. They made an early start at 10.00am, a good time for free parking; each section of the orchestra had professional coaching and there were full sessions led by conductor Guy Woolfenden. A much appreciated lunch was organised at the nearby Café Rouge and a run-through performance given at 6.00pm. It was exhausting but well worthwhile!



'Special Relationship' for Brahms Double Concerto

The soloists for the concert on Saturday 15 October at the Guy Nelson Hall are sister and brother, Thelma and Lionel Handy. They will perform the well known and much loved double concerto by Brahms for violin, cello and orchestra. This special relationship however extends even further because they are niece and nephew of Shirley Griffiths, cellist in the WSO. Both soloists have distinguished careers. Thelma became a member of the English Chamber Orchestra in 1987 and for the next eight years toured extensively with them. During that time she also played with all the major London orchestras and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. She has given many solo and concerto performances and is currently joint leader of the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. Lionel was soloist with the Bournemouth Sinfonietta and after that principal cellist for ten years with the Orchestra of St.Martin-in-the-Fields. He now performs regularly as principal cellist with the London Sinfonietta as well as being a professor at the Royal Academy of Music.

The Brahms double concerto was written for his old but estranged friend, the violinist Joseph Joachim, and the cellist Robert Hausmann. Its first performance in 1887 was panned by the critics. The generally supportive, Edward Hanslick, dismissed it as "a product of a great constructive mind rather than an irresistible inspiration of creative imagination and invention." Its failure was possibly because it explored new ground by being a romantic concerto for two instruments rather than one, and yet constructed in the Baroque concerto grosso style. Not until after 1920 did it move into the repertoire of great works.

The Symphony in this concert is No.1 by Shostakovich, a work written when the composer was only 19 and received its first performance by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra under Nikolai Malko in 1926. It had an exceptional



ovation with the audience demanding two performances of the scherzo and giving Shostakovich thunderous applause on each of the many times he was called back to the platform. It immediately had many performances and established its composer as an international figure in music.

The concert begins with another famous work by Brahms, his *Academic Festival Overture*. This piece had its première in 1881 in Breslau in front of an audience which included many university officials who were shocked by an allegedly serious overture containing popular melodies, such as *Gaudeamus Igitur*, which they knew to be favoured by students at beer parties! Nevertheless its lyrical warmth guaranteed its future success and it is one of the most frequently played pieces in the repertoire of today.

ORDER YOUR TICKETS NOW

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

Zimbabwe, the Kalahari and Coventry!

A snapshot of James Hunt, WSO double bass

Born in Shepshed, Leicestershire, James moved with his parents to Southern Rhodesia at the age of three. At eleven James went to Peterhouse boarding school in Marondera, Rhodesia. The latter, having gained independence, was subsequently renamed Zimbabwe.

James had an early introduction to music because while on holiday in England his uncle had noticed that this eight year old had a huge fascination for the keyboard and as a result funded the purchase of a piano for him in Zimbabwe. James made good progress both at home and later in school, gaining his Grade VIII before entering higher education at St. Edmund Hall, Oxford in England. He enjoyed singing at University as well as P.P.E. and was a member of a number of choirs, including the Oxford Bach Choir, conducted by Sydney Watson.

In 1971 James returned to the African continent, this time to Botswana where he took a government post in the Ministry of Finance. To compensate for the dryness of both the surrounding Kalahari Desert and the daily routine with figures, James set up as pianist in his own dance band, ably supported by a huge Kenyan policeman on the bass and his constabulary colleague on trumpet and clarinet. Real expertise came from an older expatriate who not only played drums but also sang – these were the *Gaberone Hunters*. Fame spread and the *Hunters* performed not only for the Miss Botswana competition in 1972 but also rolled out the *Anniversary Waltz* for President Seretse Khama's 25th Wedding celebration in Gabarone.

After three years in Botswana, James headed once again for England, this time to Coventry and the City Council Treasurer's Department. He continued piano playing, but a spark originally ignited in his school days when he had successfully practised a tuba for two weeks at a music camp and played a few notes in an orchestra, made him want to play an instrument which would enable him to join the larger forces of a symphonic group - so he chose the double bass! He quickly found an excellent local teacher in John Vale and in two years sped through the exams to grade VIII and acquired orchestral experience as a mature member of the Coventry Youth Orchestra.

With the skill he had gained he was soon

able to join a number of orchestras during the late seventies and these included the Coventry Symphony Orchestra under Peter Isherwood and the Leamington Chamber Orchestra under Andrew Mogrelia where he became Chairman. Amid all this activity he still found time for other things, one of which was to meet his future wife Val, a primary school teacher and artist, whom paradoxically he first encountered at a talk on *Austrian War Atrocities!*

By 1986 his career had moved on and he was shortly to become Deputy Finance Director at Warwick University but his time as a double bass player was abruptly terminated owing to a serious back problem. Skilled work by a surgeon helped give him mobility but he did not expect to play the bass again. However, some six years later, a colleague and former WSO viola player, Jolyon Hall who was holding a musical 60th birthday, persuaded him to try taking part as third double bass in a friendly performance of Richard Strauss' *Metamorphosen*. To James' amazement, this experience proved successful and he found himself able to play again.

He joined the Beauchamp Sinfonietta, played many concerts with them and eventually has become vice chairman. In May 2005 he accepted an invitation to join the WSO in a performance of Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* in a joint concert with the Royal Leamington Spa Bach Choir and like the rest of the performers was bowled over by the quality of the soloists, especially James Gilchrist. Since then James has been in

the double bass section for all our concerts reaching an organisational climax in 2009 when along with Nick Welch he successfully drove the van containing the large instruments to Paris and back for the WSO concert in Villebon.

James still lives in Coventry but has moved on to be Finance Director at Leicester University. His three children, now adult and successful, are: Rebecca, an art student turned novelist, Jonathan, an engineer and Lucy Roslyn, an actress. Rebecca's first novel, *Mr. Chartwell*, has been an instant success and was read on Radio 4's *Book at Bedtime* series.

James praises the programme planning of the orchestra and the variety of concert activity, such as: the foreign visits, the play day at the CBSO Centre in Birmingham and the Family Concerts where he actively participates in the arcane and vital process of choosing the colour of shirt to be worn by the six basses!

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Beyond the Stave!

Prelude to Die Meistersinger by Wagner



"The overture is hardly calculated to win the listener. All the leitmotives of the opera are dumped consecutively into a chromatic flood and finally tossed about in a kind of tonal typhoon."

Edouard Hanslick

[a 19th Century music critic and one time friend of Wagner who, after their relationship soured, was allegedly caricatured as the carping Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger*]