

RNCM Strings Festival

The RNCM strings festival took place on the 14th and 15th January and I am grateful to have been part of such an inspiring event. The weekend featured masterclasses with prestigious players, a UK premiere, a viola orchestra (and quartet) and an opportunity to listen to a five string viola!

On Saturday afternoon Thomas Riebl, who gave masterclasses over the weekend, played J.S. Bach's Sonata for Viola de Gamba No.3 in G minor and the UK premiere of Michael Grolid's 'Images' on his fantastic five string instrument. He then joined a viola orchestra made up of RNCM students for a performance of Bach's Brandenburg No.3. During the rehearsal of this piece we were fortunate to work with Annette Isserlis who was satisfied the actual performance could go unconduted under the leadership of Alex Mitchell, a member of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

On Saturday evening, four RNCM students; Thomas Congdon, Natalia Senior-Brown, Juliette Kowalski and Alex Mitchell, formed a viola quartet and played 'Remembering That Sarabande' by Louis Andriessen. Andriessen himself attended the concert! That same evening, Henning Kraggerud directed an RNCM string ensemble for a performance of Vivaldi's 'The Four Seasons'. This was the most inspiring performance I've ever watched. Everyone played with immense passion and it was very clear the whole ensemble was determined to produce a fabulous sound.

On Sunday, Annette Isserlis gave some masterclasses along with Pavel Fischer and Hannah Roberts. Many of the viola students, if not all, were involved in Sunday evening's Gala concert. This concert featured a performance of Vaughan Williams' 'Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis', Debussy's 'Danse Sacrée et Danse Profane' for harp (Elinor Nicholson) and string orchestra, and Tchaikovsky's 'Variations on a Roco Theme op.33 with cellist István Várdai. This amazing, award winning cellist gave his performance on Jacqueline du Pré's Stradivarius cello. Henk Guitart, who I have worked with on numerous occasions in the past and find to be incredibly motivational, conducted the piece. To finish the concert a mass string orchestra performed Tchaikovsky's 'Serenade for String Orchestra Op.48', conducted by the RNCM Head of Strings, Chris Hoyle. Ten viola players were involved in this and it was brilliant to be a part of such a large section. All in all, this has been an exceptional weekend with the opportunity to work with world-class, professional musicians.

The fantastic viola events are not only confined to our Strings Weekend: we are looking forward to Lawrence Power's forthcoming recital and masterclasses.

Emily-Grace Clifton

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