

Guildhall School of Music and Drama Viola Day Report

Henrietta Hill, Viola Fellow

On the 26th October, Guildhall School of Music and Drama held their annual Viola Day, involving 23 of Guildhall's viola students, three masterclasses and three student performances. We were also delighted to host an instrument exhibition and hear a talk by Tim Wright Fine Violins.

GSMD's Viola Professor and acting Head of Chamber Music Matthew Jones started the day with warm-ups, posture and stretching for violists and also gave a masterclass to three violists, who were not studying at Guildhall, with great success. The LSO's German Clavijo gave an inspiring masterclass on orchestral auditions. Simon Rowland-Jones' masterclass covered an amazing journey through the Bach Cello Suites 2-6. Students received inspired coaching from Simon on his arrangement of the B-Flat Brahms Sextet for six violas, and having Simon stay on to attend their performance really added to the occasion.

The students gave four world premieres of their own compositions: Tom Widdicombe – *Seven Creatures* for two violas, Tim Hansson – *Viola Sonata*, Alexander McFarlane – an arrangement of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* for viola and piano, and a viola duet *Mania* by composer Rhiannon Randle. We were delighted that Rhiannon could attend along with composer John Hawkins, whose viola sextet *Tri* was also performed.

In all it was an incredibly successful day for New Music (there was even artwork accompanying Tom's *Seven Creatures*), and for building friendships with composers and violists both from the public and members of the Guildhall community. Students' viola ensembles also performed works by York Bowen, Bela Bartok, Bernstein, Piazzolla, Saint-Saens and Frank Bridge. It was a wonderful celebration of all things viola for the Guildhall School students, staff and members of the public. We look forward to the next Viola Day at Guildhall in autumn 2017!

Warm Welcome at Guildhall School for Music & Drama

Annual GSMD Viola Day - report from Kathi von Colson, Birmingham Conservatoire

On Wednesday the 26th of October I made my way down to London to play in a masterclass with Matthew Jones. This masterclass was part of Guildhall's Viola Day. I can certainly say that I felt very welcomed before, during and after my visit. Matthew had emailed his phone number to the three participants of the masterclass - which turned out to be very helpful when I got stuck on the train just before Marylebone due to signal problems. My well-organised little trip with plenty of time to spare had now turned into a marathon through the capital of England.

When I eventually got there (literally just under a minute before my allocated playing time) I found that Matthew had swapped the order so I could have a breather and quickly run through my piece (the *Prelude* from Vaughan Williams' Suite for Viola and Orchestra) with Luisa, the lovely accompanist. Playing to the Guildhall audience wasn't as nerve wrecking as I imaged it beforehand. A good friend of mine who had previously studied in Birmingham was in the audience. It was fantastic to see her and she gave me extra support.

The first question Matthew asked after I had finished playing was what I was thinking myself: what had been successful, what felt less successful. Of course there were a million things I could think of to have done better, but it is often more difficult to say what actually went well. Most of us would probably

agree with that. Matthew's point here was that we tend to focus on the negative things and forget about the skills we actually have.

We then talked about sound and generally aiming the sound towards the last row of the hall. Matthew got me to play the scratchiest sounds in my entire life. Hard to believe that for the audience it's probably just about the right amount of dynamic as under my ear it sounded incredibly unpleasant. However I reckon it is a matter of getting used to it. I am definitely someone who shies away when it comes to playing in a public situation. Matthew got the audience involved and everyone agreed that I was now producing a more projected sound. Holding the viola scroll further up and a more grounded feeling was helping me to make a bigger sound.

I had a lovely time playing at Guildhall and felt encouraged and supported throughout. Matthew's teaching was really enthusiastic and caring. I certainly know that I will practise my scratchy noises now, and that playing in bigger rooms/halls is definitely something we all can benefit from. I felt I opened up my playing in this masterclass and wished that I could have spent my entire day at Guildhall watching the rest of the classes. Due to another commitment in Birmingham only a few hours later, I had to rush back (second marathon of the day!) and made my train with 15 seconds to spare.

I guess that is the London life after all!