

Ilkley Viola Day with Martin Outram: 25th February 2015

How often do we get to hear a whole group of viola players, all together, enjoying their instruments? Another great day of expert guidance and support from Martin Outram was enjoyed by enthusiastic violists from Yorkshire and further afield on Saturday 25th February, 2017. Ten keen amateur players were treated to Martin's gentle and enlightening coaching. The morning started with a warm-up of a lively jig, and Bizet's 'L'Arlesienne', then the group played an arrangement of a Telemann piece originally designed for four violins. Detailed coaching in the first movement encouraged the group to crescendo to the downbeat, giving tension and resolution to hear the harmonies. The second movement focussed on bowing and string crossing, using the wrist in circles and keeping the forearm still. The exuberant Cossak Dance was the final piece in this first section. Everyone played confidently, and the ensemble of massed violas had a wonderful, mellow tone.

A master class followed where each person had the opportunity to play something they had been working on. Martin's tips and guidance helped every player develop. We learnt about the use of bow speed; how to use finger tips for clear trilling; how to create smooth double stopping; and practising shifts with the 'hidden' note in place.

An arrangement with six viola parts of Selim Palmgren's 'The Swan', provided an evocative and wistful sound.

After a friendly, and cake-filled lunch, we were treated to Martin's performance of Hindemith's Sonata for Solo Viola, Op. 25 No 1. Hindemith composed sonatas for every orchestral instrument, but was by training a string player and violist of world repute. Martin introduced the piece by noting that originally the piece had not been well received by the audience – booing was heard! No booing from this audience!! The first movement was of such delicacy, that it made the hairs stand up on the back of my neck. A later movement in this work includes the infamous remark 'Raging tempo. Wild. Beauty of sound is unimportant'. Amazing. Martin is an outstanding performer and we were all entranced.

The afternoon progressed with a further master class including a father and daughter duet, and ended with further ensemble playing, including a perky arrangement of the Beatles hit, 'When I'm 64' and a rendition of the 'Queen of Sheba', with energy from all involved. It was great to see such confidence in the viola group, which grew over the day as Martin coaxed the best out of everyone.

Janet Cade





