

Ilkley Viola Day with Martin Outram, 27th Feb

Report for British Viola Society Newsletter by Jessica Wyatt (A Viola Player writes)

On Saturday 27th February 2016, 10 violists gathered to meet Martin Outram for a workshop and masterclass day in Christchurch, Ilkley – a picturesque village on the edge of the Yorkshire moors. This was the second year this event had been organised by Sophie Wallace, who had personally invited Martin to Ilkley after she had attended the Maggini quartet's course in Oxford. Some attendees knew each other from last year's day and some, like me, were newcomers – I had seen the advert in the BVS newsletters and since my parents lived for a time in Ilkley, I decided to attend and stay with them.

Over coffee, we introduced ourselves and then we went straight into a viola ensemble session, playing a Telemann piece arranged for multiple violas. We worked for a time on ensemble aspects and details of the arrangement, before swapping parts and tackling music of a completely different style: contemporary Swedish composer Palmgren's *The Swan*, arranged by Simon Rowland-Jones.

After a welcome teabreak with viola-related conversations, it was time for the first masterclass session of the day. We heard a wide range of pieces, including an excerpt of York Bowen's concerto, the slow movement of the Arpeggione sonata, some unaccompanied Bach and a couple of Watson Forbes arrangements of shorter pieces, sensitively accompanied by David Bridgewater. Points of discussion included the importance of the flexibility of the bow fingers, bow distribution and usage at the heel, vibrato width and speed, and performance advice. Martin pointed out that as compared to violinists, violists tend to play more at the heel to utilise the heavier weight of the bow.

After lunch, Martin treated us to a short recital of unaccompanied Bach and solo Hindemith – it was a joy to hear the famous G major suite paired with an unfamiliar work to most of us. Then we had a further ensemble session, this time working on *Bratschentanz* by Ian Gammie, where we rotated parts between run-throughs (keeping us on our toes!) and a challenging arrangement of the Bach G minor Viola da Gamba sonata.

My own masterclass session was next – a short excerpt of the theme and variations from Beethoven's *Notturmo* (itself a transcription of the *Serenade for String Trio Op 8*). Martin helped me with fourth finger vibrato advice and a tempo suggestion, but we agreed that the piece itself was rather difficult to play in a masterclass without prior rehearsal!

The day drew to a close with a final ensemble session, again on the Palmgren pieces, and we thanked Martin. Overall, it was a day that I found immensely instructive and enjoyable, plus I made some new violist friends, so many thanks go to Sophie Wallace and her team for organising it!