

Arpeggione Courses for Young Violists

Having just completed our 22nd Arpeggione viola course (inc all levels) I wanted to share some of the moments from our last course. We all know that playing the viola can be a wonderful experience which is often not discovered early enough in musical education, however this was definitely not apparent in our recent Arpeggione concert where we had our 31 intermediates and 14 juniors playing in a 45 piece viola orchestra.

I started Arpeggione as I was keen that all our young violists should have the chance to meet up and experience masterclasses, recitals and tuition specific to the viola. Viola players are sociable creatures who like to have fun whilst being very serious about their playing, and are often an isolated and unique specimen in their schools who I found are not challenged much with their orchestral pieces.

Arpeggione was started in 2009 by myself and Marina Solarek and began with just one course a year. We added a junior course the following year and in 2012, a senior course as no one wanted to leave. The senior course is very much based on those heading for conservatoire or music at university and they have to be a minimum of grade 8 standard and over the age of 14.

On this intermediate course, our days started with a 45 minute technical class which this year we were able to do outside as the weather was so incredible all week. We then spent the morning on the smaller and more difficult chamber pieces so they get to work with the visiting tutors each day as well as myself, Steve Tees, Mickey Posner and Anna Dryer Beers who are there all week. This year we were visited by Jonathan Barritt, Simon Tandree and Katie Heller. Katie also helped me with the art project which was to make decoupage boxes for Easter presents. The rest of the day was spent doing masterclasses, practicing outside with the chickens, listening to concerts, rehearsing in two 16 piece string groups which they learnt to direct themselves and improvising jazz. They also did a lot of sports with our resident sports coach Tom and an Easter egg hunt.

Our competition piece this year was Monti's Czardas, played in its original version at violin pitch. Rosalind Pike was our winner and did two accomplished performances, one in the barn and another in our London concert. Her prize was a lovely bow donated by Stringers of London.

This year we were fortunate enough to get funding for our first teaching place on the course for Joanna Patrick. This for me is very exciting as it is the first step towards securing the future of Arpeggione.

I am very grateful to Hannah Biss who helped me run the junior day for our youngest violists and Simon Marlow who is our pianist for the residential courses.

The courses are held in a tudor barn in Suffolk, a gorgeous venue which leaves people speechless when they see it for the first time. We are fortunate that we can use this for our concerts and all the masterclasses are round the wood burner with the kids snuggled up on sofas under blankets. This somehow encourages everyone to stand up and play as it is delightfully informal. At night, when the girls go to sleep in the barn, they said they felt as if they were at Hogwarts. The boys also got to be amongst the first to occupy the newly built bunkhouse.

All the relevant info for the courses is on our website arpeggione.org

Our next course will be the senior course in October.

Jacky Woods
18th April 2017