

## **Conservatoire Viola at Pro Corda: 15th - 20th February 2017**

This was my fourth viola Pro Corda course at Leiston Abbey, Suffolk, and it was certainly as good as previous courses I have been on, if not even better.

I think what makes Pro Corda so special for me is that it gives time to focus intensely on something, whether learning a new piece/movement or changing something more fundamental in your playing. The teachers were as inspiring as ever with Louise Lansdown, Robin Ireland, Lucy Nolan, Gary Pomeroy and Martin Outram giving lessons throughout the course.

We all had an individual lesson each day and performance classes in the evening. The classes are a great way to practise performing under pressure while receiving feedback from teachers. We were also extremely lucky to have the wonderful accompanist Charles Matthew with us for a few days, with time to rehearse with him in preparation for the classes and the concerts. Rehearsing every day with a pianist is something that you don't often get to do in college! There were two concerts this year towards the end of the course, a public "Fish and Chip" concert and a more informal concert. Both gave opportunities to showcase what we had achieved over the few days.

Other highlights of the course were Robin's two sessions focusing on tension and intonation. Each session provided a huge number of exercises and ideas for dealing with both issues.

This year's viola ensemble repertoire was as varied and strange as ever. We played through arrangements of a Beethoven trio for 2 oboes and cor anglais and Bartok duos on the first day. Then in the other session we tackled viola octet arrangements of Michael Jackson's 'Thriller' with Robin conducting and providing the voice over, and a 'Star Wars Medley'.

The course provided a much needed break from the busy term in college, and I look forward to returning again next year.

***Matthew Johnstone***