

Exploring Octets and String Orchestras



I love playing viola. It's pretty much all I think about when my mind isn't distracted with little things like the day job etc... even then, the viola is lurking, providing the sound track to my day. I'm so lucky with orchestral playing opportunities, I've played with the Bolton Symphony Orchestra for quite a few years now. But something was lacking. I wanted to tackle those big chamber pieces, or play in a string orchestra again.

In our day to day lives it's so tricky to fit everything in, and it can be all too easy to sit back and accept that those opportunities have gone, or may come up in the future.. maybe! Well, I've never been patient, and following the success of the viola days, I thought I would try my hand at organising different kinds of ensemble days.

It's crucial finding the right coach. I approached my viola teacher from university, the star violinist Helen Brackley Jones to become the ensembles' artistic director. Helen is the most wonderful communicator and educator and really makes you believe you can achieve anything. The fact that she would be directing and coaching from the violin also gives a sense of responsibility to the rest of the ensemble, and hearing her play so beautifully inspires everyone to give 110% to try and match that standard.

The Fields Ensemble was born! Over the past year and half we have explored two full days of string orchestra repertoire, and played and performed the Mendelssohn octet twice. My friends from the woodwind section wanted to get involved too, so we have also explored and performed the octet by Schubert.

Music is such a sociable art, and it's been wonderful spending days with like-minded people, playing masterpieces. Helen shares her wealth of experience, and her insights make us strive to play the works better. Playing with such good musicians makes you feel lighter than air! We have played at the University of Huddersfield, and at the stunning Smith Art Gallery in Brighouse Library.

So, if you, like me have a burning desire to make the best possible music with your friends, find a coach and a big room and go for it. There really isn't anything quite like it!

Ben Lawrence
May 2017