

## **International Viola Summer School at Benslow, 2017**

Attending Martin Outram's International Viola Summer School at Benslow assures two things: firstly, your playing will benefit greatly from an intense week of individual lessons, coaching and group master classes; and secondly, your waistline will expand by about three sizes after having consumed enough cake to feed a small army.

The catering at Benslow is not the only impressive feat. Benslow boasts a wonderful miniature chamber hall, where all lessons and performances take place, as well as four modern large practice spaces that wouldn't be amiss in any UK conservatoire.

The course is aimed at conservatoire students, or those about to enter. Each of the students receives an individual lesson with Martin each day, and later in the week coaching with pianist Julian Rolton, to prepare a movement of a piece for performance in an informal concert at the end of the week. Midway through the week a visiting baroque specialist, this time Annette Isserlis, delivers a masterclass, where each student works on a movement of a baroque piece. The students reconvene in the evening to perform in viola ensemble, working through a number of wonderful viola transcriptions and original compositions, this time including Matthew Olyver's stunning new composition for viola quartet: 'The Scent of the Wisteria'. (<https://soundcloud.com/matthew-olyver/the-scent-of-the-wisteria-a-haiku-for-viola-ensemble>)

A particular highlight was an informal performance by Martin and Julian. We were given the opportunity to hear the first run of a planned future recording of works by Vaughan Williams, including his famed Suite for Viola. The concert was truly a fine display of musicianship from a duo that have worked together for many years; Martin's exquisite tone working harmoniously with Julian's masterful control of texture. Afterwards they confessed that, because of scheduling difficulties, they hadn't had a chance to look through the whole piece, and indeed were sight-reading some of it. I thought to myself that it was lucky my sight-reading isn't as good as that, otherwise I'd never do any practice!

So, a great week highly recommended for its learning, playing and, of course, cake.

***Toby Holden***  
***August 2017***