

Summer Course 2017. National Youth Orchestra of Wales

This year marked my fourth year as a violist of the National Youth Orchestra of Wales, the oldest national youth orchestra in the world. The orchestra holds its annual summer course in Lampeter, right at the heart of Wales, before heading on a week-long tour of performances around some of the country's fabulous concert venues.

The course begins with three days of sectional rehearsals led by some of the UK's most experienced orchestral players. In the evenings we have full rehearsals conducted by rehearsal conductor and first violin tutor Adrian Dunn. His task is to get the orchestra to a professional standard before the arrival of the conductor on day four.

This year saw the return of maestro Carlo Rizzi as our conductor as a result of the special bond he formed with the orchestra last year. The first rehearsal with the conductor is always one of my course highlights. As a front desk violist you get the best of both worlds: being as close as possible to the conductor and being able to hear everything that goes on in the orchestra. By the time the conductor joins the course, the orchestra is often getting to know the repertoire very well. This means we can start really making music. This year was no exception.

Despite the average age of the orchestra being possibly the youngest it has been for the last decade, the chosen repertoire was as challenging as ever (especially the viola part!): Strauss 'Der Rosenkavalier Suite' and 'Till Eulenspiegel', Britten's 'Four Sea Interludes' and Debussy's 'La Mer'. Being able to work on these works in such detail was a fantastic experience and it allowed me to learn a lot about my own playing.

On this year's concert tour we performed at Trinity St. David's University (Lampeter), P J Hall (Bangor), St. David's Cathedral (St. David's) and St. David's Hall (Cardiff). We played a concert in pretty much every type of acoustic one could possibly imagine.

As well as making music (which everyone takes very seriously!), there is also a great social side to Nash (as it is known to all its members). After the rehearsals are over for the day, the fantastic welfare staff on the course organise compulsory activities that are always great fun. This brings the orchestra very close as a family.

The National Youth Orchestra of Wales has provided me with some of my best experiences and fondest memories of youth music, and it has inspired me and hundreds of others over the years to pursue an instrumental performing career. It must survive these nervous times for the arts.

Mabon Lly

September 2017