

The highlight of April was Emily Pond coming to play the Walton viola concerto with the North Staffs Symphony Orchestra. What an ambassador for the viola! And what a fabulous piece. One member of the orchestra described it as a moody piece i.e. the moods go from melancholy to grandeur and to sheer fun and joy with such a lovely poignant ending. When I was at music college I never considered myself good enough to tackle the Walton and I think my teacher would have agreed with me. In fact I'm stunned at how standards have improved, the Walton almost being a set piece for viola students. Anyway, I digress so back to the performance. Peter Stallworthy, our conductor, said how impressed he was with Emily. He'd never known another viola player getting such a good strong sound. I could have told him what a lovely sound Emily has always made. I can always remember her at one of the master classes led by Dr Louise Lansdown at the RNCM when I first heard that gorgeous sound – like brown velvet. But not only is Emily an excellent player she is also a lovely person with none of the 'diva' about her, obligingly changing some of her timings to help the orchestra accompany her.

Quite a number of the orchestra didn't like the Walton initially (afraid that's true) as it's very different to what we have played before with lots of awkward time changes and difficult rhythms. We've never spent so much rehearsal time on one work but I think it paid off, not getting too much in Emily's way. And Emily's playing and familiarity with the concerto brought the malcontents round. So all I can say is well done Emily. I'm pushing for you to come again and not having to push too hard either.

The nights are getting lighter and the itch to roam gets stronger, so sadly my viola practice is getting a bit more curtailed. Somebody once told me that you can practise away from the viola, imagining the current piece you are playing in your head with fingerings, good sound etc. Bit like a sports person imagining themselves winning to give themselves an adrenalin rush to achieve the goal they are after. I've tried imagining myself playing a piece beautifully and then got a nasty shock when I put bow to string. On reading Katti's article on practice techniques she uses to achieve a good performance of the Vaughan Williams suite (seems to me to be working as I heard Katti play very well indeed three of the movements at Pro Corda) and also Jack in the March BVS newsletter on the Hindemith when again at Pro Corda he gave a very mature and assured performance. I wonder if perhaps just thinking about a performance isn't enough and that's where I'm going wrong.

Interesting and well written article by Toby Holden on Robin's viola day in April. Sounds fantastic. Well worth going to. The next one is to be held on July

8<sup>th</sup> at Ravenfield (in South Yorkshire). Unfortunately I shall be walking the Kinder loop that weekend so another chance to improve my playing gone. Maybe next time.

Here's to work/life balance. Never seem to get mine right

Janet Pazio