

ProCorda February 2016. Emily Dore reports.

After spending a week in such a viola-orientated atmosphere, it's hard to fit back into normal life! Waking up to the wonderful sound of people practising before breakfast put me in a good mood for the day. After breakfast, lessons started at 9.30 am. We had a lesson a day, each day with a different teacher, and every one was amazing. The chance to have coaching from the likes of Louise Lansdown, Lucy Nolan, Robin Ireland, Gary Pomeroy and Tegen McGrahan is a rare experience! From tips on how to practise, to little technique exercises and help with musicality, the range and amount of advice was invaluable! Finding space to practise was always fun, with a house full to the brim with viola players (and cellists) I was often to be found practising in the toilet (which actually had a surprisingly good acoustic!) Wherever you walked at any point of the day, the sound of viola echoed around, which really pushed me to want to practise as much as I could. We had a hearty lunch, followed by more practise and lesson time.

The highlight of each day (aside from the one-to-one lesson) was a class in the evening where everyone performed at least twice over the week. This was followed by an informal discussion on the performances, giving feedback and positive criticism to all. It was so inspiring hearing members from older years play, or people playing same repertoire as you, and being able to take the good bits of their playing to better yourself, while also helping them improve. After the discussion was over, there was plenty of time in the evening to bond with other violists from all over the country, with a game of pool or cards which brought us all together.

At the end of the week, we had the opportunity to play in the Fish and Chips concert, to which the wonderful John Thwaites came especially to accompany us. It was a chance for us to show the results of the hard work we'd put in during the week, and also a chance to hear repertoire that we may not have been familiar with, for example the Bowen viola quartet which was exhilarating to hear. It was so refreshing just to sit back and enjoy amazing music, and there was so much pleasure in watching everyone play with such passion and excitement. One of the highlights was all 27 viola players (including the teachers) playing Julius Klengel's *Hymnus* (in 12 parts), surrounding the audience with an overwhelming sound, which was described by a member of the audience as being "bathed in melted chocolate"! We were also given a surprise concert by cellist Sandy Baillie, who gave an exciting and gripping performance.

This week has inspired and encouraged me, and everyone else on the course. It really reminded me of why we all play music: to bring joy to ourselves and to those listening.

