

Royal Birmingham Conservatoire featured at the 45th International Viola Congress

The Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (RBC) and the British Viola Society were delighted to present 15 viola students, three actors and four members of staff at the 45th International Viola Congress (<https://ivcrotterdam2018.nl/>) in Rotterdam from 19-24 November 2018.

It was a year ago that our proposals were sent to the Dutch Viola Society, hoping we might be lucky enough to be chosen to present some of our exciting ideas. The remit was presenting music in a new way and when you read about what we did during the congress, hopefully you will agree that we managed to achieved this!

On Wednesday 21 November, final-year undergraduate violist Yue Yu played lesser-known works by York Bowen in recital with pianist Anthony Hewitt. This included Bowen's Melody for a G-string; a short unpublished piece in E flat; Romance in D flat and Phantasy. Yue Yu was a prizewinner in the second Cecil Aronowitz International Viola Competition (2017) and has just been selected for the live rounds of the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition that will be held on the Isle of Man from 6-13 April 2019.

Thursday 22 November saw eight RBC violists and three actors from Birmingham City University School of Acting perform Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" with Borisovsky's arrangement of Prokofiev's great score arranged for viola and piano. Anthony Hewitt was again playing the piano for the RBC violists. It was a magical piece of musical theatre and the effect of combining the script with the musical score was utterly compelling to watch and experience.

In addition, eight members of the group had the privilege of playing in master classes to inspiring teachers from across the world – Karen Meidell (USA); Jorge Alves (Portugal); Atar Arad (USA); Marc Sabbah (Belgium); Jutta Pucchammer-Sedillot and Christine Rutledge (USA).

The group finished off their performances with Hindemith's Dramatic Masterwork (a one-hour- long play) 'Der Bratschenfimmel' (Viola Mania) on Friday 23 November. RBC violists for the first time tried their hand as actors, stage hands and technicians as they undertook this challenging task.

From his early period, violists will be familiar with several of Hindemith's serious viola compositions: the two sonatas for viola and piano op.11 no 4 (1919) and op.25 no 4 (1922), the three sonatas for solo viola op.11 no.5 (1919), op.25 no.1 (1922) and op.31 no.4 (1923). His less serious compositional, literary and artistic pursuits from this time are not as familiar. The unknown treasure from this period is undoubtedly the play Der Bratschenfimmel, the last of eight Dramatic Masterworks written by Hindemith for his 'Urian' Club between 1913-20, for him and his friends to perform in their homes. This hour-long farce certainly begs the question as to when and where the 'viola joke' originated, surely not in Frankfurt in 1920?

Hindemith wrote the play for his friend Albert Linder, a musically enlightened bank official who lived in Frankfurt. Abdul – a dissatisfied, vengeful and not altogether sane bank official concocts the elaborate and grotesque murder of the bank manager (his boss) by... anti-violin playing! Heinous, obsessively scraped, anti-violin playing can be heard at various intervals throughout the play – Abdul's crazed attempts to commit murder.

In addition to this, RBC staff members Alistair Rutherford and Anthony Hewitt cycled from Birmingham to Rotterdam dressed as the Cycling Violin and Cycling Toilet respectively in order to raise funds for the ARCO Project - see <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/conservatoire/about-us/arco>

RBC graduate Alistair, known first and foremost as the Running Violin after having smashed two Guinness Book of Records for the fastest half and full marathon dressed as a musical instrument, took on the challenge to cycle to Rotterdam alongside colleague Anthony Hewitt, the Olympianist! A few years ago, Anthony cycled from Lands End to John O'Groats giving a piano recital in a different venue each night en route. The choice of a toilet costume illustrates the demise of the anti-violin playing protagonist Abdul from "Violin Mania" - the final act is set in a toilet in the Co-Operative Bank!

We were treated to amazing talks, concerts, presentations and tons of new music. Highlights included Lawrence Power, Nobuko Imai, Timothy Ridout, Yuval Gotlibovitch, Kim Kashkashian and Atar Arad.

Viva Violin - those of you who were not in Rotterdam for this epic week definitely missed out!

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