

Report on Viola Workshop in Ravenfield with Robin Ireland 09.02.2019

Early one cold, blustery Saturday, I set off from Birmingham, with two students from the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, bound for Ravenfield, for a viola workshop, led by Robin Ireland.

On arrival, we were welcomed by our host and organizer, Natalie Wing, who lives on an idyllic smallholding in South Yorkshire, with various livestock, including a goat and hens, and her faithful spaniel, Fern, who also appreciates the viola! Refreshments and lunch were provided by Natalie in her lovely cottage. The 12 participants met over coffee/tea, before gathering in the comfortable converted Hay Shed for large ensemble playing, tutored by Robin.

Now the music.... After warm-up exercises, our viola ensemble of 12, led by Roger Hoyle, played several works arranged for up to 6 parts, including pieces by Corelli, Bach, Haydn, Kodaly and a fun piece, composed by Robin Ireland: "Deviant Jig for 6 violas". Playing 1st or 2nd viola, my A string was prominent, with lots of ledger lines and treble clef to keep me on my toes. Compensation followed later, when I was viola 4 part in one of the smaller ensembles.

The Masterclass followed after refreshments, with Qianqian Yao and Yuxin Chen playing studies by Hoffmeister and Campagnoli. Robin gave encouraging tips and comments on posture and even facial expression, as well as technique and musicality. The audience was given lots to apply to our amateur playing.

Roger Hoyle gave a fascinating insight into 20th century English viola music in the pre-lunch "listening session", with audio extracts from his vast CD collection, including a movement from Pairings, a composition by Robin. Most of the works were unfamiliar to me, so I look forward to part 2 next time....

Over lunch, including Natalie's tasty homemade soup, we sat and chatted, getting to know Qianqian and Yuxin a little more.

After lunch, Robin's technical session covered "Classical bow style: bow strokes and articulation". A few lines from two movements of Mozart's "Eine kleine Nachtmusik" were used to analyse and demonstrate different bowing techniques. I learnt so much - playing such familiar music will never be the same again!

Another large ensemble session followed, before we split into 3 groups for informal ensembles, playing through a variety of arrangements for 3 or 4 violas.

After more tea and homemade cake, the final session was an informal recital. The program was Bach's Sonata No 1, an unaccompanied Bach Partita and Grieg's Sonata Op 36, all written for violin or cello and transcribed for viola, played superbly by Robin, accompanied by Angus Webster, a talented young pianist (and conductor and instrumentalist).

I recall the trepidation with which I set out some three years ago to my first viola workshop: would I be out of my depth? Would the other participants be friendly and welcoming? All worries were totally unfounded! This time, my sixth workshop, I was eagerly anticipating a wonderful day of viola-ing, catching up with regular participants who are now friends, and meeting new viola enthusiasts. I was not disappointed! Thank you Robin, Natalie - and fellow participants!

Jane Clarke 12/02/2019