

Dear Friends at British Viola Society!

I'm really delighted to be part of this community, and am looking forward to sharing my journeys playing the viola around the world with you!

Looking back at the past year, I feel very honoured to have met so many wonderful musicians and performed so much great music!

Some of my personal highlights were playing the Walton Viola Concerto with Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra, playing Mozart Sinfonia Concertante with Sir András Schiff, the great violinist and a good friend of mine, Stephen Waarts and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, and also performing Harold in Italy with Orchestre National De Lille.

In July and September I had two big challenges... recording with orchestra.

In July I recorded Hindemith Kammermusik No. 5. For those of you who don't know it, it's an absolute tour de force and both musically and technically is completely relentless. My preparations began over a year before the recording took place. In fact I started practising in February 2018..... of course in the meantime I had many other programmes which I had to perform and focus on, however I kept the Kammermusik constantly on the back burner.

The first test of my preparations was in October 2018 when I spent a week in Blonay, Switzerland, having lessons with my dear teacher and mentor Nobuko Imai. This showed me how much work was left to do!! I remember working frantically with a metronome in the build-up to the lesson.... but I still couldn't really tackle all of the difficulties of this piece. Nobuko guided me through, and shared some practical advice as well as some ideas about interpretation. It was rather well suited that we were doing this work at the Hindemith Foundation in Blonay!!

Over the next few months I kept chipping away and of course there were swathes of weeks at a time when I didn't manage to touch the Hindemith, and in June I came into the final stretch. Two weeks prior to the recording I was in Japan for a recital tour with the pianist Benjamin Frith. We were playing a programme of works I knew quite well - Beethoven Horn Sonata (in the brilliant transcription by Rudolph Leopold) Schubert Arpeggione Sonata, Schumann Adagio and Allegro, and Vieuxtemps Sonata. Whenever I found a free moment I was practising Hindemith.

Finally, a week before the recording I was back in the UK and could focus on preparations for recording. I remember how anxious I was about if I had really learnt it well enough, and if I understood it properly... when I arrived at the Studio in Hamburg and we did the first play through, suddenly all of those fears went away. The music took over, and I just enjoyed this remarkable piece of music! Of course it was a very intense day of working, rehearsing and recording; but due to the fact that I had really engrained the notes and the structure I really did feel liberated to enjoy the characters and colours! It was a privilege to record this piece!

I'll write about the journey with my other recording another time, but now I need to prepare for some recitals and my debut with BBC Symphony Orchestra playing the Bartok Concerto on 19th November.

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