

Patrick Ireland, the original viola player with the Allegri Quartet, has just celebrated his 100th birthday, on November 20th. He was a Cornish lad, and got off to a good musical start as a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral, singing at both the Coronation and Funeral of King George V. He finally made it to the Royal College of Music as a violinist in 1946, after being trained as a bomber pilot by the RAF. He arrived mercifully too late in the war to have to drop any bombs. He met Peggy Gray at the RCM. She invited him to play through the Brahms D minor violin sonata, and the rest.... is history. They married in 1948 and had 72 years of married life.

Patrick joined the Peter Gibbs Quartet as 2nd violinist in 1948, and switched to viola when the original violist left. Peter Gibbs was a genuine RAF ace and by all accounts pretty difficult as a quartet first violinist. When the quartet disbanded in 1953, Patrick was set on changing career, thinking of becoming a museum curator. William Pleeth, best remembered today as the teacher of Jacqueline duPré, invited Patrick to try out with a new quartet, and Patrick agreed on condition that it was "just for fun". After a second such meeting, his resistance broke down, and the Allegri Quartet was born.

That same year, 1954, Patrick was able to buy, for the princely sum of £300, a battered but wonderful-sounding Brothers Amati viola. 1954 was also the year that I was born, and I have had the privilege of playing the Amati for the past 25 years. It has recently been restored and no longer looks battered!

As a violist, Patrick was effectively self-taught. In 1956, the Allegri were the chosen quartet for Barbirolli's still famous recording with the Sinfonia of London of Elgar's Introduction and Allegro, which has had just under 2 million hits on Spotify, if we can believe them! During the late 1950s, Patrick met Yehudi Menuhin and played with him in the Bath Festival Orchestra, which Menuhin directed. He performed Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante for violin and viola with Menuhin, and recorded Bach's Brandenburg Concerto no.6, which has two solo violas, with him in 1959. When playing with Menuhin, he was able to borrow a Stradivarius viola! I remember seeing it in the house. Menuhin invited him to be the viola teacher at his new specialist music school. He and Peggy played viola and piano duos and were invited to do a live broadcast concert for BBC Radio 3, the recording of which we still have. It features Schubert's Arpeggione Sonata. Patrick plays many passages an octave higher than any other versions I have heard, with remarkable success! I never asked him why.

In 1977, Patrick left the Allegri, shortly after Peter Carter became their third 1st violinist. He obtained the post of Assistant Head of Strings at the Royal Northern College, sharing an office with his formidable boss, Eleanor Warren, who adored him. They both chain-smoked, and students entering the office were half-asphyxiated by the thick atmosphere. Patrick continued to play into his 70s, and took the role of 2nd viola in countless quintet performances with many of the best known UK quartets, including with the Lindsays after I became their viola player.

Patrick today is still remarkably lucid if you catch him at a good moment, and has very strong opinions on plenty of the musicians he knew in the 50s and 60s. A few years ago he became

very critical of ALL quartet recordings he heard, saying the balance was all over the shop, and nothing would persuade him that perhaps his hearing was not quite what it used to be! His legacy will include not only musical memories and recordings but around 100 magnificent and unique pieces of hand-crafted furniture. He was still woodworking until about 5 years ago.