



British Viola Society Annual Report 1 January 2020 - 31 December 2023

Introduction

The British Viola Society (BVS) was established in October 2012, replacing the English Viola Society founded by John White and Dr Louise Lansdown in 2007. As Honorary President, John White supported the Society in its transition to the British Viola Society. He sadly died in December 2013 and the Society did not appoint another Honorary President until July 2016, when the composer and violist Sally Beamish kindly agreed to accept the position. At the same time the Society was further strengthened by the recruitment of additional Committee members to help it grow and function more efficiently.

The Society is affiliated with the International Viola Society, but operates as an independent Society with its own constitution and regulations. As a nonprofit organisation, the primary aim of the BVS is to promote viola performance, teaching, research and many other viola-related activities.

Review of Activities January 2020- 31 December 2023

The effect of the COVID pandemic in 2020 affected everyone across the world and the activities of the Society were very curtailed or limited, with online performance and communications being the only option for many months. The effect of the lockdowns in 2020 had a major impact on the Society's work and it was very welcome when more normal activities and face to face events became possible in 2021 onwards.

During these difficult times we were very grateful to the hard-working committee who discovered the value and efficiency of communicating via Zoom. Richard Muncey, our excellent Treasurer resigned after 6 years of loyal service to the Society in 2022. We are delighted that he has been ably replaced by Paul Hickman.

Viola Excellence

The Society has continued to have a prominent role supporting international viola competitions which provide career and developmental opportunities to some of the best young viola talent across the world.

Due to COVID restrictions the third Cecil Aronowitz International Viola Competition planned for November 2020, was postponed until November 2021. Much of the initial selection process was by electronic application but, miraculously, live competitors were invited to Birmingham to perform in person to the jury and a very small audience. The BVS remained a significant collaborator in this major viola event, financially supporting a documentary called '*Cinderella No More: The English Viola Legacy*' featuring Timothy Ridout.

Looking ahead to 2025 the Society is very excited to be collaborating with the joint Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition (LTIVC) and Cecil Aronowitz International Viola Competition (CAIVC) which will be held for the very first time at The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, Gateshead from 19-25 January 2025.

The BVS regrets that it was unable to send representatives to either the 47th International Viola Congress (IVC) in the state of Georgia, USA (June 1-5, 2022) or the 48th IVC in Thailand (June 6-10, 2023). However, it has submitted a proposal for the 49th IVC to be held in Brazil (7-21 July 2024) which has been accepted. Watch this space!

Viola Repertoire

The Society recognises the importance of continuing the great legacy of celebrated British violists such as Lionel Tertis, William Primrose and Cecil Aronowitz, both in terms of promoting and cherishing the current viola repertoire as well as ensuring its continuing growth.

The Society continues to promote new viola compositions and we are delighted that during lockdown and more recently our BVS members continue to develop new viola repertoire.

In particular in 2023 Garth Knox published three new Spaces for Viola and in 2020 published his new concerto for viola, the "Pocket Concerto". Instead of the solo viola playing with a full orchestra, this piece is written to be performed with just a single cello as the only accompaniment.

Robin Ireland has transcribed several movements from the sonatas and partitas originally for solo violin by J.S. Bach for four violas which have now been published. Thomas Riebl has arranged J.S. Bach's suite for lute in G minor for his five string tenor viola and BVS member Geoffrey Allan Taylor has arranged Six Dances for Solo Viola by William Byrd to celebrate the anniversary of Byrd's death in 1623. Geoffrey selected the six pieces from The Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, which as a keyboard player and viola student, inspired him to make the arrangements.

BVS member and composer Stanley Grill, based in the United States, recently composed a work called The Bridge for viola and orchestra, which is available in a recording with soloist Brett Deubner.

2022 saw the Sinfonia of Birmingham give the world premiere of "Christ on the Road to Emmaus", a concerto for viola and strings written for the occasion by Robert Matthew-Walker, and composed in memory of Gwyn Williams (Section Leader viola during Sir Simon Rattle's time at the CBSO).

For 2024 the Society is hoping to be able to give support to the Bliss Trust and the Arthur Bliss Society on a project for 2025 to mark the 50th anniversary of Bliss's death, which involves the orchestration by Philip Wilby of the Viola

Sonata, written in 1933 for Lionel Tertis. This will be a significant addition to the 20th century repertoire of viola concerti.

Raising the Profile of the Viola

The Society promotes master classes, recitals and open days, accessible to players at all levels and has a very small budget to give discretionary support to students who would otherwise be unable to attend courses. These activities had to stop in 2020 due to COVID restrictions and slowly started to pick up in 2021-2022 as restrictions were relaxed.

We are pleased to share news about courses and events for all ages: “Arpeggione Courses” directed by Jacky Woods and Sunday morning events at the Royal Northern College of Music for “Young Violas” and in addition summer schools for school age players, conservatoire and amateur players.

We are delighted to see the enthusiasm of our amateur adult members. A Viola Ensemble group thrives in Sheffield and meets once a month, giving regular short informal public performances as part of the Classical Sheffield weekends.

BVS professionals provide development days and courses for keen amateurs and conservatoire-level students throughout the year. For example, Martin Outram (BVS Vice-President) directs an annual Viola Summer School at Benslow Music for diploma-level students.

The Aronowitz viola course run by Louise Lansdown and Lucy Nolan is held every February at 'Lavethan', Blisland in Cornwall for Conservatoire level and younger students. Matthew Jones and other violists also run courses across the UK. Robin Ireland and Martin Outram both direct regular Viola Workshop Days to develop the skills of amateur players.

Throughout the year the BVS has been proud to promote the ARCO Project, initially a collaboration between the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and Morris Isaacson Centre for Music, Soweto, South Africa. The ARCO Project is now based at the Royal Northern College of Music where Louise is Assistant Head of Strings. Launched in January 2016, the project delivers music education including viola lessons, primarily via Zoom, to young people in South Africa.

Pre COVID, the annual ARCO Festival in Soweto enabled the ARCO students to meet their UK student teachers for a week of tuition and intensive music making. One of the ARCO violists was funded by the Gwyn Williams Memorial Trust for Young Violists. Kwanda Buthelezi visited the UK, participated in workshops and classes, and watched the Cecil Aronowitz International Viola Competition and Festival. Whilst here, Kwanda was given a new viola from Cardiff Violins. She is now studying Law at the University of the Western Cape and still plays the viola.

Kwanda's brother, Lindo, travelled to the UK to attend the National Youth String Orchestra Course in April 2019 and he also watched the last Tertis Competition on the Isle of Man. ARCO also supported six of its students to attend the South

African National Youth Orchestra (SANYO) "What it Takes" Viola and Double Bass Courses held in Johannesburg in July 2019.

In fund raising for ARCO, the viola was given extra publicity, notably by BVS member and at the time ARCO Project Manager Alistair Rutherford. Alistair has broken two Guinness Book of Records for the fastest half and full marathons dressed as a musical instrument. In this instance a viola of course!

Communications

The Society aims to be relevant to and communicate with a wide range of people interested in the viola from professional players, teachers, luthiers, conservatoire and other advanced level students, to keen amateurs including adult 'late starters'.

The main communication channels continue to be through the BVS website, and Facebook, and X (formally Twitter) in our endeavor to engage with a wide audience. Earlier this year we initiated a major revamp of the website to give it a more modern appearance and attract new visitors and we give special thanks to Alison of Alison's Websites and Giovanni Gaidoni for their technical help and detailed revisions to the content.

We are very grateful to Peter Whitehead, our Facebook Coordinator who works tirelessly to update the BVS Facebook presence.

We are very grateful to Peter for keeping the BVS alive through social media and it is a pleasure to find so many interested violists from across the country keen to get involved and help us with our viola mission.

We are delighted to be supporting young viola players aged 18 years and under. Vanessa Gaidoni coordinates our BVS Young Violists group which has around 38 young people. Membership of the group gives one year's free BVS membership plus access to an Instagram group and a web-based blog where news and information relevant to young players is posted.

We maintain our commitment to engage with students at most of the British Conservatoires. We thank Maria Parfitt for her work in this role for several years. Maria has recently been replaced by Thomas Cai, our new BVS coordinator and he is building up relationships with the nominated student representatives and sharing news of student viola events and activities.

As a benefit of BVS membership our members receive a regular e-newsletter. Distribution is now every two or three months in order to focus on more in-depth articles, as well as promote and advertise viola events and other news of interest to our members. Our e-newsletter was launched in October 2013 and has just reached its 68th issue (January 2024). We are delighted to feature articles from students, professional players and luthiers as well as reviews of viola events, concert news and members' adverts. Due to the success and coverage of this regular newsletter, the annual BVS Journal has been discontinued.

The Society is satisfied that it complies with the GDPR requirements and provides a secure, efficient and effective administration and a high-quality service to our members. We are particularly grateful to our Membership Secretary, Tim Walton, who continues to work very hard to maintain the membership lists and advise on payment of subscriptions.

Membership: January 2024

General members paying full subscription: 53

Concessions and student discount: 63

Committee:10

Honorary Members: 14

BVS Young members (under 18 years): 38

TOTAL: 178

Our Committee as at January 2024

Sally Beamish - Honorary President

Louise Lansdown - President

Martin Outram - Vice-President

Sue Douglas - Secretary and Newsletter Editor

Paul Hickman- Treasurer

Tim Walton - Executive Secretary, Membership

Janet Pazio - Executive Secretary, Groups and Orchestras

Peter Whitehead - Executive Secretary, Facebook

Thomas Cai - Conservatoire Coordinator

Vanessa Gaidoni - BVSY Coordinator

Dr Louise Lansdown

BVS President

February 2024

<http://www.britishviolasociety.co.uk/>