
LARK *music*

ISSUE 5



BEHIND THE MUSIC 

Featuring Nicola Benedetti

What's Inside

Cover Story

4-5



Nicola Benedetti at 30

She has no wish for lavish gifts on her 30th birthday but Nicola Benedetti expresses her desire to fathom a way to formalise her education work

26-29



Land of legends

The Gower Festival goes from strength to strength, thanks to a music-loving team led by Artistic Director Gordon Back who has been attracting top musicians to the idyllic peninsula in south-west Wales

12-15



I had to be tough

Lyric baritone Sir Thomas Allen has natural talent and shares his craft by encouraging young opera hopefuls

22-25



It was serendipity

Annette Isserlis put her heart and soul into arranging the posthumous birthday concert in honour of Francis Baines – and she planned it in her personal woodland

Welcome

It is fascinating to discover what goes on behind the scenes in the world of top-class music and inside this issue of LARKmusic I hope you will enjoy reading the exclusive features which capture our interviewees' passion and incredible drive for perfection.

The Lark team has been enjoying some wonderful music, attending events from the Francis Baines' centenary concert to recitals at the Royal College of Music, the Suffolk schools' Celebration at Snape Maltings and this summer's Gower Festival – meeting clients and making new friends along the way. Read on for the full stories!

Back in the office, it's been busy with a focus on improving our insurance products and online service so I am pleased to introduce our new Public Liability Cover, as well as highlighting our new quote and buy portal which will make buying insurance cover online even more convenient. Please turn to pages 8-9 for details.

Looking ahead, I'm also delighted to confirm that Lark will be joining London Sinfonietta's 50th birthday celebrations in 2018 and we will continue to support the Endellion String Quartet as they mark their 40th anniversary. Both fantastic milestones!

Gemma

Gemma Deavall
Divisional Director
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16-19

Radio One at 50.

Broadcaster 'Diddy' David Hamilton presented the Radio One afternoon show during its heyday in the 1970s and helped many bands get their foot on the ladder to fame

ARTICLES

20-21

Musical Notes

Private Client Director Julie Webb shares her news and travels; meeting clients, musicians and singers while attending events and concerts across the UK



6-7, 30

Out & About

Isabella Valentini has been supporting the young violin makers' competition in Prague and the Suffolk schools' music makers during the Celebration at 30





Nicola Benedetti inspires students during a Music in Secondary Schools Trust programme Picture: Benjamin Ealovega

I want to formalise my education work

Classical violinist Nicola Benedetti has been teaching since she was a teenager and now, as she turns 30, she tells journalist Lesley Bellew about her plans to ‘bring everything together’

If there’s one thing that Nicola Benedetti would like to do to mark her 30th birthday it is to formalise her education work.

Nicola, who was 30 in July, has been going into schools to teach pupils since she was 15 but has decided she wants ‘to get everything more organised’.

She said: “I do so many things so it would be good to bring everything together, formalise the education work and link everything to give it more structure – to offer greater quality music and creative experiences for as many children as possible.

“It has always been quite natural for me to teach and give masterclasses; it is something I have always been quite drawn to, perhaps without identifying it. Am I evangelical? I suppose so!

“When you love the music so much, you want to make sure other people have the chance to experience the music, too – so it is out there for everyone.”

Nicola, who attended the Yehudi Menuhin School, was awarded an OBE in 2003 and the Queen’s Medal for Music in May 2017, collaborates with a diverse range of teachers, musicians, charities and music organisations.

She said: “Many of us feel moved by a

growing willingness to work together, to develop the level of music tuition, collectively, and re-address how we define our belief in the need for the creative arts, and send this message out more confidently.

“I’m more energised, inspired and uplifted than ever. I always want to be extremely enthusiastic so the enthusiasm is powerful enough to be infectious and alert others to the idea of loving this music.

“Doing something musical and creative in schools has such far-reaching benefits, besides the fact that it should be incredibly enjoyable for young people. ▶

► Nicola, who was born in West Kilbride, Scotland, and started to play the violin at the age of four, said: “Classical music has a beauty and complexity, as well as a creativity and most wonderful sound. It is always interesting to me, especially with young kids, that if you put on a piece of Stravinsky or Beethoven in front of them, generally speaking they react in an extreme way.

“Children are not in that mental space where they have any prejudice so they hear the music for what it is, which is a fantastic sound. It’s something they can listen to and feel something.

“The music is dramatic and diverse, much more so than pop music which is far more, well, let’s say homogenised.

“I just wish there was a whole bunch of music pieces that children get to hear when they are four or five years old – in my experience when they are exposed to music at that age they react very strongly.

“That’s my goal at 30 – I really do not have a personal goal. I’ve never had the ambition to live here or own something particular – in fact, I’ve never had that sort of feeling, it’s strange.

“I would also like to become more comfortable with myself, more humble in the process and develop as a person and a violinist.”

Nicola played the Proms on July 18, and celebrated her birthday with a big party for friends and family the next day.

She said: “I had a proper party in London because I have so little time to catch up with friends.

“There is something about playing a concert at night. I preserve everything for the performance so it is not until after a week off and the weight lifts that I get in touch with everyone I haven’t spoken to in a while. That’s how I spend any free time – catching up with people.”

When teaching, Nicola, who plays a 1717 Gariel Stradivarius, also warns students that there are no short cuts to learning a piece of music.

She said: “I suggest to students that when they start to learn a piece of music, they should put in an enormous number of hours at the

very beginning – that’s what I do.

“With some violin concertos the pieces can be so large, and so complex, that at first they seem like an impossible task but if you keep on going you can get there.

“There’s no way to speed up that process so I always say be focused, learn well and keep going until it solidifies – don’t worry about the initial stages being messy!

“Because I do a lot of masterclasses I do try to think about my own journey and playing style because you go through so much information if you are seriously studying an instrument like the violin.

“There’s a lot of opposing information with people telling you to do this and that – use your body, follow your instinct, don’t move too much or you’ll disturb the band ... there are so many ridiculous notions and it is a tricky thing to balance!

“I often just try to present the students or audience with information but also aim to get them into a mental space of trusting themselves and their own creative way to work something out to sound better and develop their own style.

“We are ourselves and we can’t get away from it – so embrace the element that’s in-built. Embrace and be far more experimental to find deeper individuality.”



CONCERT DATES 2017-18

Aug 25 Gstaad Menuhin Festival, Mozart VC3 with Santa Cecilia and Antonio Pappano

Sept 5 RSNO, Elgar VC, Peter Oundjan: Dundee (Sept 6 Edinburgh and Sept 7 Glasgow)

Sept 23-24 Bremen Phil, Brahms Double with Leonard Elschenbroich

Oct 27 & 29 San Diego Symphony with Cristian Macelaru: Wynton Marsalis VC

Nov 2-4 Philadelphia Orchestra with Cristian Macelaru: Wynton Marsalis VC

Dec 2-3 New World Symphony with James Gaffigan: Szymanowski VC

Jan 8, 19-21, 2018 Dallas Symphony with Donald Runnicles: Beethoven VC

Feb 3-21 OAE UK and North America tour with Marin Alsop: Beethoven VC and Mozart VC5. Concerts in Oxford, London, Birmingham, Basingstoke, Saffron Walden, Santa Barbara, Oakland, Rochester, San Francisco, Ottawa

Visit nicolabenedetti.co.uk



Nicola with young string players from A R Rahman’s Sunshine Orchestra of KM College of Music and Technology, Chennai, India Picture: Helen Taylor

Celebration!

Suffolk is a music county (think Benjamin Britten and Ed Sheeran) and the Lark team arrived in force to support the unique schools' music festival, says Music Account Handler Isabella Valentini

'IF WIND AND WATER COULD WRITE MUSIC, IT WOULD SOUND LIKE BEN'S' – YEHUDI MENUHIN.

The above words of virtuoso violinist Yehudi Menuhin rang true for the Lark Music team who spent a week in Aldeburgh for the Suffolk schools' Celebration at 30 Festival.

The wind whistling through reed beds, moody skies, seagulls screeching and waves dragging shingle down the beach powerfully echoed Britten's music – and his legacy lives on through children performing in the festival.

Here in 'Benjamin Britten country', more than 1,500 children went on stage in the Snape Maltings Concert Hall and Lark was proud to support the event. So keen, in fact, that we

rented a place for the team to stay. We called it Lark Lodge!

Group Managing Director Stephen Lark, Managing Director David Foster, Music Divisional Director Gemma Deavall, Commercial New Business Manager Lewis Doyle, Graduate trainee Matt Westbrook, Marketing Manager Mike Bramford, New Business Account Handler Natalie Hills and I attended concerts throughout the week.

Over the last 30 years, some 40,000 children have been involved in the music-making festival and in the audience we met parents who themselves were part of Celebration when they were at school.

From tiny tots to sixth formers, orchestras to ensembles, the enthusiasm for music was contagious. Every evening, the

schools came together for the final piece, I Wish, composed by Gwyneth Herbert. Gwyneth explained she 'needed new noise, with a sense of possibility' so she asked the children to give her their three wishes – one for themselves, one for someone they love and one for the world.

Gwyneth said: "The song was one of genuine celebration of Snape Maltings; the extraordinary creative work they do; of singing and the magical feeling of community it generates; of young people and the power of their voices. It was an invitation to make a wish and make it happen."

We at Lark were still humming the chorus as we drove back down the A12.

Visit snapemaltings.co.uk



Snape Maltings, right, is known for the Aldeburgh Festival (now Aldeburgh Music). The festival was created by Benjamin Britten and his partner Peter Pears who lived nearby in The Red House, from 1957. When Snape Maltings ceased to malt barley in the mid-1960s, Britten leased the largest building and converted it into an 830-seat concert hall. The present hall replaced it after a fire in 1970. Left, Isabella Valentini stayed on in Aldeburgh and took a walk on the beach (with dogs Rita and Polly) to see artist Maggi Hambling's Scallop which commemorates Benjamin Britten



The Celebration Festival gives children a chance to experience what it is like to be a professional musician

Pupils from singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran's former school, Thomas Mills High, took part in Celebration at 30.

Sheeran's former music teacher Richard Hanley said Celebration is a unique 'bring and share' event.

He said: "What makes Celebration so special is that there is no audition. Every school in Suffolk can take part with students of all ages, from a small rural school to a full orchestra.

"The children experience what it is like to be a professional musician; going to the concert hall, being allocated a dressing room and going into the Green Room.

"They also attend a rehearsal where everything is marked on stage and learn how the stage crew check positions and lighting."

Richard added: "Suffolk has a strong and vibrant county music service which has been both protected and promoted. There is a good relationship between the music service and Suffolk County Council.

"This part of world does tend to attract people who are interested in the creative arts and want their children to experience high quality arts' education. It is amazing.

"I have taught the grandchildren of the Countess of Cranbrook, who helped Benjamin Britten set up the Aldeburgh

Festival, as well as opera singer Nancy Evans and librettist Eric Crozier's grandchildren.

"Celebration started in 1987 and our school played in the first concert. We have taken part most years, taking the orchestra, chamber choir or other ensembles.

"About 10 per cent of our 1,100 students are involved in the choir or orchestra and we go on music tours every other year, performing in cities such as Vienna, Salzburg and Paris. We also have a strong jazz group. It is very normal to be a musician in this school.

"Music is a precious thing but resources in the UK are being squeezed. It would be a disaster if children were denied access to music."

Ed Sheeran keeps in close contact with the school and calls in to run workshops.

Richard said: "Ed has been adjudicating a song-writing competition and recently sixth form students were involved with his Castle on the Hill video. He thinks highly of the school – and says he would like his own children to come to such a school."

Ed Sheeran MBE portrait in London



Ed Sheeran by Colin Davidson, 2016

The National Portrait Gallery in London has acquired a new portrait of Ed Sheeran. Painted by the Belfast-based artist Colin Davidson, the four-foot square oil on linen portrait is the result of an encounter in which a sitting was proposed between the artist and the singer's father John, an art historian. Sheeran, who was awarded an MBE this summer, sat for Davidson at his Suffolk home. Sheeran's third album ÷ (Divide), released in March, debuted at No 1 in the Official UK Album Charts with 672,000 sales in the first week and made history as the fastest-selling album by a male artist. Visit npg.org

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In a bid to make it even easier for you to purchase insurance for your instruments, we have created an online portal which will enable customers to get a quote, buy and view their policy documents online 365 days a year! The system is quick and easy to use, with simple questions, so customers obtain a comprehensive and affordable policy.

Over the last 20 years, LarkMusic has provided music insurance to a range of audiences such as musicians, orchestras, dealers and students. We continue to share our clients' passion for music and pride ourselves on the personal service and advice we provide. This ethos remains at the heart of our musical instrument team and they will still be on hand should you need any guidance.

We understand the busy schedules that many musicians face, so we believe our new system will save you time and allow you to focus on your passion for music.



By Gemma Deavall
Divisional Director

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We have noticed that with so many musicians playing in public areas, it is becoming more important that they cover themselves for any injury or damage they may cause.

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*IT WAS
DAD WHO
TAUGHT
ME TO
FIGHT MY
CORNER*

Sir Thomas Allen is one of the finest lyric baritone singers of our generation and as Chancellor of Durham University he is also a great supporter of music education. Private Client Director Julie Webb discovers how he 'encourages the craft' of opera singing



You have to stick up for yourself

On a balmy evening at West Green Opera, in Hampshire, Sir Thomas Allen charmed the audience by singing *La ci darem la mano*, from *Don Giovanni*, with Royal College of Music student Rowan Pierce.

Sir Thomas has sung more than 50 roles at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, making *Don Giovanni* his signature role, and the enchanting duet highlighted his pleasure at being able to give a talented young singer the chance to take centre stage.

He also told the audience how thrilled he was to have been appointed Chancellor of Durham University in 2011 – although he insisted that he did not see himself as a teacher but as someone who could ‘give young people guidance’.

When I met Sir Thomas in London, I asked him if he was understating his role, but he explained: “From Day One when I stood on a platform as a 15-year-old to sing as a baritone, I knew instinctively what to do and how to tell the story, so that wasn’t something I could coach.

“There were lots of things I had to learn but that part of it came easily, it was a natural thing to do.

“Further on in my career, when I was at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, many colleagues had students but I never had a desire to teach anyone how to sing – I prefer to encourage the whole the craft of what we do, sharing techniques of acting and how to use words and interpret them.

“It really works when someone has discovered how to match the words with the music; it then becomes entirely natural. You are not aware of any technique that is involved, just somebody that’s speaking to you, but

there’s something strange in the way they are doing that. They are singing – you realise they are singing but they’ve created a harmony between text and music.

“Singers come in all sorts of different categories with sub-divisions of voices. I am very much a sub-division! I am not a bass, I am

“*At 15, my voice was not so different as it is now*”

a baritone – although not just a baritone, I am a lyric baritone with dramatic tendencies; a high baritone who occasionally take roles that are associated with a tenor. It is quite complicated.

“At 15, my voice was not so different as it is now – it is really quite a natural one.

“With youngsters I might be able to steer them in a direction and say ‘you

might benefit from this or that’ and hopefully give them the right kind of guidance.

“With somebody young like Rowan Pierce, who is promising, you take the voice quality for granted.

“Success can often rest on whether or not you can make yourself heard.

“The ones who don’t make it, who may have all the right qualities, are the ones who can’t fill the house with their voice.

“I encourage Rowan to grow and she always surprises me.” (see page 14)

Sir Thomas also reminded me that singers have to be tough and endure.

He said: “I have had to survive. I remember in the late 80s, the great Italian director Giorgio Strehler was rehearsing *Don Giovanni* at La Scala, in Milan. I went straight to wardrobe and was in rehearsal costume for the next month.

“He looked at me with my fair hair and almost dismissed me there and then, saying ‘It is not possible’ and accused me of being a ‘Viking’.

“But I had to convince him. You ▶



Sir Thomas Allen became Chancellor of Durham University in 2011 and has found himself continuously surprised by the hunger for music and arts in the region



Sir Thomas takes time out in his shed to build intricate scale model ships

► have a choice, go home and cry, or stick up for yourself. I rose to the challenge – you have to fight.

“He did it to everyone but I wasn’t going to let anyone do me down. I also did it for my dad who taught me to fight my corner.”

The author of *Billy Elliot*, Lee Hall, says his story of a boy who came from a mining community in north-east England to dance *Swan Lake* was inspired by Sir Thomas’s story.

Sir Thomas said: “My wife hates that reference to *Billy Elliot* because I was an only child and fortunate in having loving and understanding parents, although I did grow up in a Durham village where most men worked in the pits.

“It is also true that when I came down to London I found it very hard, but the similarities end there. My father didn’t work at the mine because he lost a leg in a motorcycle accident when he was 21.

“Lee Hall and I met at an event at the *Observer* newspaper offices and we have been in correspondence since then because there was a threat to withdraw arts funding in the Newcastle region and Lee orchestrated an arts campaign.

“There is such a pool of talent in the North East and things are changing. The Arts Council has granted £6 million to build a performance centre in Sunderland and that will make such a difference to the area.

“Durham University also supports a Samling Academy where 20 schools, students and undergraduates from Northumberland, Newcastle and Durham come together at weekends. We try to engage with outreach programmes because it is so easy for castle walls to seem intimidating.

“One lass told to me ‘I love acting and every time I go to the academy I learn something new’.

“These kids are so passionate and they come out of the woodwork saying ‘I want to sing Schubert’s *Lieder*’. It’s such a surprise. It is easy to make assumptions about a region but people are hungry for music and the arts.”

No wonder then, that Sir Thomas’s encouragement of young performers now ranks highly in his continuously busy life.

Modesty prevails from the man who has sung for the ‘great and the good’ including the night that Diana, Princess of Wales, wore her famous black taffeta strapless dress at Goldsmiths’ Hall in 1981, as well as performing to 12,000 guests at Buckingham Palace during the Queen’s Jubilee party.

He said: “The Queen is remarkable. When I received the Queen’s Medal for Music in 2013 we had a terrific conversation for about 45 minutes. She is well-informed so we had quite a chat about the Scottish National Opera.”

Sir Thomas Boaz Allen

Born September 10, 1944, Seaham Harbour, Co. Durham

Honours

1984 Hon MA, Newcastle; 1988 Hon DMus, Durham; 1988 Fellow Royal College of Music

2000 President of British Youth Opera

October 2011 Appointed Chancellor of Durham University

□ Sir Thomas will be performing as Mirko Zeta in *The Merry Widow* with the Metropolitan Opera Company in New York, USA, in December 2017.

Visit metopera.org

No end to talents

It is Sir Thomas’s sublime baritone voice and natural extraordinary acting talent that sets him apart as one of the finest operatic performers of our age but there seems to be no end to his talents.

He has a golf handicap of 3, he paints and is a skilful craftsman, having made several large, detailed model ships. He said: “In this business, you have to find ways to switch off and switch on to something else, so I go down to my shed.

“I listen to Radio 4 or the Test Match and make model ships, big period vessels including Nelson’s naval ships and the *Vasa* warship. I went to Stockholm to see the *Vasa* because I could not quite work out how one certain piece of rope should be fixed.

“I said to Jeannie (Sir Thomas’s wife Jeannie Farquharson, a former Hardy Amies’ model) let’s go and take a look. It was amazing to see the ship and I was able to finish my model – although it took 16 years!

“My great grandfather was skilful and made middle rigger models so I grew up looking at them, although I was never allowed to go too close. He made pit mining engines and marine engines, too, and I think they are in storage in Sunderland Museum.

“I have been intending to get in touch with the curator for some years. It is on my list ...”

Tom's so ridiculously modest

Congratulations to soprano Rowan Pierce who graduated this summer after six years at the Royal College of Music.

Yorkshire-born Rowan, from Saltburn-by-the-Sea, says Sir Thomas Allen has been a great inspiration to her.

She said: "Tom is one of the UK's most treasured artists, one of the world's best, and yet he is ridiculously modest and he really cares about what he does and the people who work with him.

"He always remembers a name and a face and he has interests that go way beyond singing.

"Our job can be all-consuming and some people live their lives bound up in it all but Tom has interests, knowledge and a fantastic life outside his work and I always admire that."

Rowan, 27, whose parents and brother are amateur musicians, explained: "Tom is a wordsmith and adapts to any repertoire he is given. He can act just as well as he can sing and so I learn from him on stage; the way he moves and the scenarios he creates for the audience, even when he is not singing – it is so engaging.

"Tom is always happy to listen and give advice. I have been so lucky to work with him and learn from him."

At 16, Rowan travelled between Saltburn and London every Saturday, to study at the Junior Royal Academy of Music, (flute and singing). At 18, she became a teaching assistant in a Stockton-on-Tees comprehensive school and worked for two years before being promoted to Unqualified Classroom Teacher, teaching music to 11-14 year olds in classes of 30, then moving to London at the age of 21 to start at the RCM.

She says she 'fully appreciated' the opportunity to sing with Sir Thomas at West Green Opera last summer, and along with another Samling Artist, Timothy Langston, she sang with Sir Tom, Ann Murray DBE and



Rowan Pierce says Sir Thomas Allen 'really cares about people he works with'

Malcolm Martineau at the Oxford Lieder Festival.

"To be side by side with such inspirational artists makes you understand how it should be done," she said.

As a Britten Pears Young Artist, Rowan performed Drusilla in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* under the direction of Richard Egarr at Snape Maltings. Other operatic roles include Susanna in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, Miss Wordsworth, Emmie and Cis in Britten's *Albert Herring*.

She has performed live on BBC Radio 3's *InTune* from the V&A and Wigmore Hall, at the Royal Albert Hall, St John's Smith Square, Sage Gateshead and the Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace. Rowan was the winner of the Van Someren Godfrey Prize and made her Proms debut on August 1, 2017 with William Christie and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (OAE).



CONCERT DATES 2017

Sept 15 Mozart and Mahler in Lammermuir Festival with BBCSSO, Scotland

Oct 18 Short recital at the Queen's Gallery Buckingham Palace, London

Oct 26-27 Schumann's Requiem with Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Edinburgh and Glasgow

Nov 9 Samling Artists at Wigmore Hall, London

Dec 8 Messiah with CBSO Chorus, Symphony Hall Birmingham

Dec 9 JS Bach's Christmas Oratorio Winchester Cathedral

Dec 16 Handel's Messiah with Edward Higginbottom, Oxford

Dec 29 The Four Seasons by Candlelight with Raymond Gubbay, Barbican, London

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I discovered them first!

RADIO ONE CELEBRATES ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY IN OCTOBER AND JULIE WEBB TALKS TO BROADCASTER 'DIDDY' DAVID HAMILTON WHO PRESENTED HIS AFTERNOON SHOW DURING THE HEYDAY OF POP MUSIC

Almost every pop music fan listened to Radio One in the late 1960s and early 1970s – it was the only station dedicated to the genre, apart from ‘pirate’ Radio Luxembourg which was restricted to evening hours.

In 1973, Radio One bosses had a reshuffle in preparation for competition from stations such as Capital and LBC and David Hamilton landed his afternoon show.

David said: “Tony Blackburn and I both got the first three-hour slots. Tony presented the breakfast show from 9am to noon and I took the afternoon slot from 2pm-5pm with Johnnie Walker in between with the lunchtime show.

“I always had a record of the week, called Hamilton’s Hotshot, and a single would be played on air every day which could often launch a singer or group’s career.

“When I was doing the voiceover for Sunday Night at the London Palladium an American female trio, The Three Degrees, had to step in for singer Clodagh Rodgers who had been taken ill.

“I thought they were sensational and the next day persuaded my producer to change the Hamilton’s Hotshot to their single Year of Decision and it went straight into the Top 20.

“Their next single, When Will I See You Again, went to No 1 across the globe and The Three Degrees went on to achieve 13 Top 50 hit singles between 1974 and 1985. Prince

Charles famously said they were his favourites but I always say ‘remember I found them first! I still keep in touch with the lead singer Sheila Ferguson.

“When records ‘went gold’ and sold half a million copies, disc jockeys who backed the music would also receive a gold disc.

“I was so pleased to receive one for the single Do You Really Want to Hurt Me from Culture Club because, at the time, in the early 80s, they were very different and ahead of their time.

“The bosses at Radio One didn’t know quite what to make of them.”

How did you come to love music?

That’s an easy one – as a teenager growing up in the late 1950s, Peggy Lee and Bing Crosby were always on the radio and then, all of a sudden, great rock ‘n’ roll songs by Buddy Holly, Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis were being played. It was an incredibly exciting time.

We didn’t want our parents’ music, we wanted our own sounds and the music of the 60s and 70s was the very best in my opinion.

I actually came into the music industry by accident. At 18, I was working as a television scriptwriter but got called up for National Service in the RAF and was posted to Cologne, in Germany.

I told my commanding officer I was a writer and asked if there was anything I could do to make myself useful.

By good fortune he offered me the job of reading the football scores on British Forces Network. I was

► pleased about that as I am a Fulham FC fan but the music on that station was for the officers - all old stuff.

I asked if we could add some rock 'n' roll music to the programme, such as Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard, but I don't think he knew what I was talking about.

Elvis was serving in Frankfurt at the time. I didn't get to see him but Connie Francis came to our base, promoting her song Lipstick On My Collar and I was star-struck.

After National Service, I came back to the UK and continued to work in the pop industry. Cliff Richard was one of the first singers I worked with to promote the song Move It.

We were both teenagers and he was a really good guy – and wow, what a career he has had.

I was also lucky enough to conduct one of the first TV interviews with The Beatles in 1963 and later introduced them when they topped the bill in Urmston, Manchester.

A year later I compered The Rolling Stones at the Palace Theatre, in Manchester. Unfortunately, I parked my little red MGB sports car outside and when I got back a Mick Jagger fan had scratched a message in big letters 'I love you Mick' – obviously thinking it was his car.

It took me a week to get the repairs sorted so I did feel a bit odd driving around with that written on the bonnet.

I was also lucky to be working on Top of the Pops during the 1970s, they were such fun times. I compered many concerts for big-name stars like David Cassidy.

David always hated the girls screaming over his music. He wanted them to hear him sing – he had a great voice. One night he put cotton wool in his ears to block the screams but that meant he couldn't hear the band. Nobody seemed to notice ...

I also met Michael Jackson after he came over to London to open the Harrods sale in 1999. At the time, Mohamed Al-Fayed was the owner of Harrods and Fulham Football Club.

He had invited Michael along as

the singer had never seen a game of 'soccer'. I was the man on the mic so at half-time, I announced Michael was in the ground and in the blistering heat, with a Fulham umbrella to give him some shade, he walked around the edge of the pitch to half-hearted applause because the fans thought he was a lookalike. Once they realised it was Jacko, the place erupted!

Michael Jackson came to see a game at Fulham but the fans thought he was a lookalike

I spent 18 seasons at Fulham, a glorious time for the club which included three promotions, a European final and their longest ever run in the top division, and still attend as many home matches as I can.



Diddy and Doddy

'Diddy' David, who is now a grandfather to nine children aged two to 17, got his nickname from comedian Ken Dodd.

He was working on Ken's Saturday night TV show and Ken asked him 'Do you mind if I call you Diddy? I think it might stick.'

The show was broadcast to millions of viewers and he was right, says David, "I have had the nickname for 45 years!"

At 79, David continues to work on the radio with daily four-hour shows for The Wireless and he can also be regularly heard on BBC Sussex and BBC Surrey.

He said: "Radio has really changed since Radio One started in 1967. When I started there really was only Radio One because offshore Radio Luxembourg was restricted to evening and night hours. Now there is so much choice for the listener with around 600 music stations to choose from, catering for every possible taste and genre."



David Hamilton with his Mini Cooper, complete with Diddy number plate



David in the studios at Radio One in the mid 1970s

Favourite track?

"I have so many favourite tracks but if I have to be pinned down it would be John Lennon and Paul McCartney's The Long and Winding Road.

"I stayed on my grandparents' farm, at the end of a long and winding road,

during the war but when I was 15, my grandfather retired and the farm was sold.

"Years later I met Junior Campbell, of Marmalade (Ob Bla Di, Ob Bla Da fame) and when he told me where he lived, I realised his house was on my grandfather's farm.

"We became friends and 10 years ago, when he decided to move, I bought the house from him. Mrs H and I moved from Barnes, in south-west London and now love living in West Sussex with our cocker spaniel Amber.

"A wonderful long and winding road of life."



The cover picture from David's book, The Golden Days of Radio One, features stories about the DJs during the height of the radio station's popularity.

How many do you recognise?

From left, standing: Ed Stewart, Dave Lee Travis, Emperor Rosko, Alan Freeman, Annie Nightingale, John Peel, Johnnie Walker and Terry Wogan. Front: David Hamilton, Noel Edmonds and Tony Blackburn

ON TOUR

David Hamilton is now touring towns across the UK with his own show, David Hamilton's Rock 'n' Roll Back the Years, which features a band and three singers plus David as compere. It celebrates rock 'n' roll through to the 1960s and runs until October 2017.

Visit rocknrollbacktheyears.co.uk

NEW BOOK

David Hamilton's book The Golden Days of Radio One: Hotshots, Big Shots and Potshots has just been published and tells the story of the station and its stars including Terry Wogan, John Peel, Dave Lee Travis, Kenny Everett and Noel Edmonds.

Price £9.95.

Visit ashwaterpress.co.uk



As you can probably tell from this packed magazine I've been attending wonderful music events and meeting some incredibly talented people who are dedicated to music.

It was fun to chat to 'Diddy' David Hamilton, who I grew up listening to his show on Radio One in the 70s, when the station was reaching 24 million listeners. His knowledge of popular music is forensic – I even went home and dug out one of his vinyl albums in my garage. Should I be embarrassed? No very proud!

David talked about how, after a career in London, he loved moving back to his grandfather's farm in West Sussex – and he is not the only one who goes back to his roots.

It was heart-warming to learn that both Gordon Back, Artistic Director at the Gower Festival, and Sir Thomas Allen, Chancellor of the University of Durham, also return to the places of their childhood to put time into supporting music and the arts in regions that deserve support.

End of an era



I popped along to say hello, but not goodbye, to Malcolm Singer who has retired from his post as Director of Music at the Yehudi Menuhin School. Malcolm has worked with young musicians throughout his career, including Tasmin Little, and has composed music for many performers. Best wishes go to the school's new head, Kate Clanchy, who will arrive from Westminster School, London, in January.



Top treats

Regular visits to the Royal College of Music continue to be a treat, from watching Nicola Benedetti and Maxim Vengerov masterclasses (twice!) to witnessing BBC Young Musician of the Year 2014, pianist Martin Bartlett, play an extraordinary recital during a Lark Music evening in the Parry Rooms.

Our talented Lark Scholar Alex Lomeiko is moving on after graduation from the RCM and we wish her every success (see my Lark Ascending blog), while we will continue to support flautist Renate Sokolovsko as she studies for her MPerf.

Left: Julie and David Hamilton with his gold disc, received for promoting Culture Club's 1982 single Do You Really Want to Hurt Me, which saw sales of more than 500,000

MUSICAL NOTES

News from Julie Webb

Lark Private Client Director

London calling

Those who read my Lark Ascending blog at larkinsurance.co.uk will know the Francis Baines' 100th anniversary concert at the Cadogan Hall, in London, was an absolute knockout. It was a great privilege to learn more about the talented, but rather modest, Annette Isserlis who organised the event (see next pages).

King's Cross, or N1C as it is now known, continues to grow as a creative quarter and we were proud to partner the PRS for Music Foundation as percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie started her new role as King's Cross Musician in Residence to explore new music with people who live, work and study in the London postcode area.

I've also attended some fascinating private music evenings as well as the Royal Philharmonic Society Awards where I met many familiar faces.

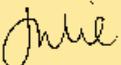
I even found time to drop into the Howard Hodgkin: Absent Friends Exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery. Curator Paul Moorhouse was brave to present the preview a fortnight after the artist's death and took time to talk to me about Portrait of the Artist, Hodgkin's last work.

And guess what, at the V&A's fabulous Pink Floyd: Their Mortal Remains exhibition, who did I see, drummer Nick Mason!

The Lark music team will be at the British Violin Makers Association Conference in Oxford on September 16 and 17, as well as dropping in to Blackheath Conservatoire in south-east London during the same month.

If you would like to join me at any of the Lark Music events get in contact at julie.webb@larkinsurance.co.uk

Best wishes



PS For those following my return to learning the flute, I have passed my Grade 3 with merit – but I'm not yet ready to take to the stage!

Read my Lark Ascending blog at larkinsurance.co.uk



Top: Lark's Isabella Valentini and Julie Webb with Sir Thomas Allen; Centre left, Alex Lomeiko and the RCM's Fiona Rose; Julie and Gordon Back. Above, Martin Bartlett with his mother Hazel, right, and music agent Gillian Newson

Serendipity



Annette Isserlis was introduced to the baroque viola by Francis Baines and it changed her life. She tells Lark Private Client Director Julie Webb how she was inspired to mastermind a posthumous 100th birthday celebration in his honour

After many years of ‘enthusiasms’ Annette Isserlis found her true musical identity when Brian Richardson, the enlightened head of music at Chiswick Polytechnic, invited Francis Baines to become a viol tutor.

She immediately loved the repertoire of the 17th and early 18th centuries. “It was complete serendipity,” said Annette. “I had flirted with the idea of being a dancer, and a painter, but when I left boarding school I felt intuitively that my destiny was as a musician. I played the piano seriously, but I’d wanted to play a stringed instrument as well, and so embarked on the viol and the ‘straight’ viola simultaneously.

“Two years later, I got into the Royal College of Music on the strength of my piano audition, and when Francis became Head of the Early Music department he started a baroque ensemble and it went from there.

“Although I studied mainstream viola with Bernard Shore, to the

latter’s dismay Francis encouraged me to take up the baroque viola – and I found that my viola and I loved the gut strings!

“Francis would say ‘come and play Purcell or Gibbons’ and his love for the music radiated out to his students.

“He not only had a profound understanding and conviction of the music but a sparky imagination and humour – his generosity and creed of democracy was in the purest form.

“At informal music sessions at Francis and June’s home in Barnes, south-west London, he initiated many who subsequently became leading players of the early music revival of the 1970s and 1980s. Many of us still play together and took part in his centenary concert in April.”

Annette was the driving force behind the Francis Baines centenary concert at the Cadogan Hall which celebrated his life, compositions and playing of the double-bass and the treble viol.

She said: “It would have been

Francis’ 100th birthday on April 11, 2017 so I wanted as many music lovers as possible to join a fond celebration of his life; he was a great friend, inspiration and extraordinary musician of many parts.”

And that she did – the concert featured music composed by Francis, including the Hoffnung Festival Fanfare, his Grounds for double-bass and a Fantasy for six recorders; plus Lawes, Consort a 6 in F; Purcell, Suite from King Arthur; Hurdy-gurdy dances; Haydn, Symphony 82 in C and J.S. Bach, O Jesu Christ, meins Lebens Licht.

The whole evening was a triumph as friends also took to the stage to remember Francis’ wonderful eccentricity – regaling stories of him from coming in late for a Beethoven symphony rehearsal but rather than joining in mid-way he played the whole part from the beginning while the rest of the orchestra played on – to celebrating his versatility on the double-bass and the treble viol, the French bagpipes (musette), pipe and tabor, shawm and hurdy-gurdy. ▶



Left, Annette Isserlis in her ancient wood (Picture: Ian West) and above, the Isserlis family at the Abbey Road Studios in London. From left, Steven, parents George and Cynthia, Annette and Rachel



**Francis Baines
Remembered**
A MUSICAL
EXTRAVAGANZA

Join us for a fond
celebration of this
extraordinary
and eccentric
musician of
many parts.

Tuesday 11th April, 7.00
Cadogan Hall



Left: Francis Baines centenary flyer illustrated by Ben Hoffnung. Above: Rachel, Annette and Steven with Jan Schlapp, right, playing in Ton Koopman's Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra

A place to unwind

To source the energy to arrange such a huge musical event Annette gained inspiration by spending time in a Kent wood – not any old wood, but her own piece of ancient woodland.

It is a place where she goes to think and it was here she contemplated the concert, thought through the arrangements and wrote the programme notes.

Annette bought the six-acre wood with money bequeathed by her father and she finds it place of 'sanctuary and peace'. She said: "Perhaps I should have done something sensible like invest in property but I have a cottage and find that enough to look after.

"I had always dreamed of owning a wood, to help conserve wildlife, be closer to nature and watch the seasons change.

"It's a peaceful place but social, too, and I come here with my family and friends – we cook over a fire and I've occasionally camped, in spite of the numerous wood-ants!

"I've had lots of three to five year enthusiasms in my life; getting my private pilot's licence, photography and keeping chickens (including hen Dorinda who was interviewed about Haydn's 'La Poule' for the OAE!), but

the woodland is for keeps!"

Annette's woodland in the Weald of Kent, a few miles from her home, becomes a carpet of wood anemones in early spring, followed by swathes of bluebells. Foxglove spires shoot up near the pond and dusky pink hellebores bow their heads in the dappled shade.

I had always dreamed of owning a wood to conserve wildlife

She said: "There's a seat and a swing that are made from a dead tree, so anything I add is natural and from the wood. I have created a pond, cleared some space and planted. New life is springing through; I just want to preserve the wood for its natural beauty and wildlife.

"I don't have central heating at home so it provides me with plenty of fuel and there is a chestnut coppice so I pick up fallen chestnuts and roast them and give them to friends. I try to make use of everything I can.

"It is a magical place; I have seen a hare in the wood, as well as badgers

and a variety of birds, and I do all I can to encourage diversity by leaving piles of deadwood."

It seems the enchanted wood certainly gives Annette amazing powers.

She was well-connected through being a founder member of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Sir John Eliot Gardiner's English Baroque Soloists, in addition to many other baroque ensembles, and many distinguished performers were happy to give their services for the concert including Michael Chance, Fretwork, Sir Nicholas Kenyon, Colin Lawson, Andrew Parrott, Roy Goodman, the Hanover Band, Pavlo Beznosiuk, Alison Bury, Philippa Davies, Lisa Beznosiuk and Chi-chi Nwanoku.

Annette felt happy that she'd fulfilled her aim of acknowledging Francis's achievements, introducing him as a composer and above all making it into a reunion party for all who loved him. Many present who hadn't known him said they came away wishing they had. In addition she was able to make a donation in his name to the Donkey Sanctuary (donkeys being his favourite animals), as well as bringing out a book about him, collated by Tim Crawford. ▶

Born into a musical family

Annette and her younger siblings Rachel and Steven learned to play the piano around the age of three and she remembers them having to sit on piled telephone directories to reach the keys.

Annette explained: “We were brought up listening to classical music, and the third programme, Radio 3, was always on. Rachel went on to be a busy professional violinist and Steven is well known as a cellist and has been awarded a CBE.

“Music was in the family. My pianist/composer grandfather Julius was born in Kiev and was one of 12 Russian musicians who left Odessa to come to Europe – and never went back.

“My father, George, then aged five, was smuggled to Vienna to be with his parents. He became an accomplished violinist, studying alongside members of the Amadeus Quartet, but it was wartime and as there was a shortage of scientists a career in metallurgy was suggested as being more stable.

“He had a Viennese charm and continued to enjoy concerts, socialising with his refugee friends and to play, rejoicing in the feeling that he was ‘better than average’. Some of my earliest memories are of lying in bed and hearing him practising downstairs – Paganini, Tchaikovsky and Brahms.

“My mother Cynthia was a pianist and teacher, so the viola was the obvious instrument for me to take up for family chamber music, to complete the Isserlis Piano Quintet.

“Classical harmony was a language we absorbed at the same time as learning to speak and read. We played as a piano trio from an early age and ensemble was always intuitive. That was a great advantage, having learned to play the piano and accompany people.

“We enjoyed chamber music and that teaches you to co-operate – it is a conversant way of playing music.

“It also gave me a practical understanding of music-arranging later on.”



Annette indulging in one of her 'enthusiasms', flying a Vickers Viscount chartered from British Air Ferries (from the co-pilot's seat) while travelling with the Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists in the early 1980s

About Annette

Annette Isserlis is Professor of Baroque Viola at the Royal College of Music, Royal Academy of Music and visiting tutor at the RNCM. She was a founder-member of Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and principal viola for Gardiner's EBS for more than 20 years.

She has toured, recorded and broadcast extensively, as well as appearing as a soloist and chamber-musician. Annette is a regular participant at IMS Prussia Cove Open Chamber Music and a member of Sir Andras Schiff's Cappella Andrea Barca.

About Francis

Francis Baines was a frequent performer at Aldeburgh Festival in the 1950s-1960s, displaying versatility on the viol and violone, the French bagpipes (musette), pipe and tabor, shawm and hurdy-gurdy.

He worked with several leading London chamber orchestras before deciding to concentrate on early music.

Francis also had a long-standing commitment to encouraging young musicians, though he was dismissive of his abilities as a teacher. For many years he had supplemented his income as a lecturer in schools, and at one time was ensemble coach to the Oxford University Music Club.

He founded the Chamber Music Club of the Mary Ward Settlement in London where he was a lecturer from 1948-1950. He loved to compose, although composition took a back seat as he became more in demand as a bass-player in baroque and classical orchestras.



Concert dates 2017

Annette will be performing with the OAE, Clemenza di Tito (dir Robin Ticciati) at Glyndebourne on **Aug 3, 6, 8, 11, 13, 16, 19, 21, 24, 26 and 28**

Sept 15-17 IMS Prussia Cove
Sept 22 OAE at Kings Place, London, CPE Bach and Boccherini (dir Christoph Coin)
Sept 24 OAE Saffron Walden – Sally Beamish premiere

Land of



The Gower Festival goes from strength to strength as world-class musicians accept Artistic Director Gordon Back's invitation to play at the unique summer event held in churches across the land of King Arthur



Arthur's Stone on Cefn Bryn on the Gower Peninsula, inset, Gordon Back

The Gower Festival takes place on summer evenings in beautiful churches across the Gower Peninsula, in south-west Wales.

This year, every one of the 14 venues was a sell-out, bar a couple of tickets, and Lark was delighted to support a concert at St George's Church in Reynoldston, featuring pianist Craig White and cellist Jamal Aliyev.

The evening of romantic cello music saw 105 people packed into the pretty church which has an interesting

Norman font created from a stalagmite.

Jamal is fast-becoming one of the most sought-after cellists and following the concert he returned to London to prepare for his debut performance at the BBC Proms, celebrating composer John Williams' 85th birthday.

At St Cenydd's Church, which overlooks the sea at Llangennith, Russian piano duo Pavel Kolesnikov and Samson Tsoy also demonstrated why they are such stars of the

piano world. Their mesmerising performances of Schubert's Fantasy in F minor for piano four hands and Divertissement for piano four hands were nothing short of astonishing.

So how does such a remote region attract such highly regarded musicians? Well, each church has fine acoustics, the settings are sublime but, according to locals and the musicians, it's all down to the hard-working festival team who are led and inspired by Artistic Director Gordon Back.

legends



Picture courtesy of City and County of Swansea, visitswanseabay.com

Gordon, himself an internationally acclaimed pianist, has been putting back everything he loves about music in his former home county.

He said: “Gower is a small but unique festival and it has become a great passion of mine – a home from home.”

Gordon ensures there is music for all from string quartets to jazz, the Wales International Academy of Voice singers and the Yehudi Menuhin School Orchestra.

He said: “I am trying to broaden the appeal of the festival by introducing younger performers such as Jamal and Pavel to create a wider audience base.”

The plan appears to be working with cello students such as Ellie Medwell, 15, in the audience at Reynoldston.

Ellie said: “This is my first live concert. I will remember this evening for the rest of my life and Jamal has completely inspired me!”

The Gower Peninsula is a place of

legend and Arthur’s Stone stands tall on Cefn Bryn. It’s said King Arthur found a pebble in his shoe, threw it across the Burry Estuary and it landed on Cefn Bryn. The stone grew and grew and was held up by the other smaller stones in admiration.

It seems Gordon Back is becoming a 21st century legend across Gower, ensuring exciting music is performed to the highest standard in a part of the world where music has always been so important.

Gordon has worked with artists ►

Home from home

► including Yehudi Menuhin, Maxim Vengerov and Yo Yo Ma. He took over as Artistic Director of the festival in 2013.

Jamal Aliyev, winner of 2017 Sir Karl Jenkins Music Award and Prince's Company Competition, was quick to praise Gordon's dedication. He said: "It was my first time at the Gower Festival and from the moment I arrived, I couldn't have had a better time; everything was happening so flawlessly that I didn't have to worry about a thing.

"Gordon had arranged everything to such perfection that myself as an artist and the audience had a wonderful time."

Gordon said: "I am lucky enough to have accompanied some of the best

musicians in the world. A special memory was performing with Sarah Chang, aged 10. She played Elgar's Salut d'Amour at St James's Palace for Prince Charles and I thought 'where does this music come from?'. It was incredible.

"That's what I want to bring home to the Gower Festival – amazing talent and amazing music for everyone.

"I did not come from a privileged family with a musical background. My father developed polio when I was two and he was paralysed for the rest of his life. My mother was a hairdresser.

"When I was seven we spent a holiday in Aberystwyth; I pushed my father in a wheelchair to a Royal Philharmonic Orchestra concert with conductor Sir Thomas Beecham.

"A pianist played Beethoven's 'Emperor' concerto and that was it. I said to my parents, 'I want to play the piano'. It was an evangelical moment.

"The local chapel organist was my first teacher and I started to take part in Eisteddfod competitions.

"Wales still has the National Eisteddfod; it is one of Europe's largest cultural festivals of music, song and poetry. This gave me lots of opportunities to perform. First prize was two guineas (£2.10) but it felt like £2,000, a huge amount!

"I went to Neath Grammar School where the head teacher was crazy about rugby and music. There were 800 pupils and the orchestra had 120 members. Luckily, if you were in a youth orchestra you were given instruments.

"I started playing violin at 11 and that definitely helped me in my career as an accompanist. My speciality is playing with violinists and those skills were picked up during school times because, technically, if you know how something works it's easier to accompany. It's a sort of sixth sense.

"Around the age of 13, one of my great experiences was to accompany Welsh male voice choirs. You would get music thrown in front of you, music you had never seen, but the more you do it, the more you learn.

"Having flexibility was important and that skill, as an accompanist, is more important than people realise.

"I was fortunate to have played 20 concertos with the Glamorgan Youth Orchestra by the age of 18, before I went to the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester.

"I assumed that I was heading for a solo career but when my professor heard me accompany a singer in the Richard Tauber Competition at the Wigmore Hall. He said, 'that was amazing – you have got such a talent as an accompanist'. I was unaware because it was so natural to me – it was part of my life." ►



Top: Jamal and Craig receive an encore; above, early evening drinks at St George's, Reynoldston; above right, Ellie Medwell, 15, and grandmother Susan

Next stop, the Menuhin Competition

Gordon Back is also the Artistic Director of the Menuhin International Violin Competition. It is a bi-ennial event and regarded as the world's leading international competition for young violinists.

He says the competition is different from any other.

“In Cardiff in 2008 I chose the Vivaldi Four Seasons for the Junior Final and asked the competitors to perform and conduct – a first in any competition.

“Violinists are asked to compose their own cadenzas as well as to improvise. The kids love it but their teachers and parents are petrified!

“The winner, Chad Hoopes, did make a mistake but the jury felt he was a great musician and a great communicator.

“The Chairman of the jury, Pamela Frank, agrees the young players should not be afraid to challenge themselves or even make mistakes.”

In 2010, two days before the competition was due to be held in Oslo, the glacial volcano Eyjafjallajökull, in Iceland, threw ash into the atmosphere and brought all flights to a standstill.

Gordon said: “Nobody involved in the competition will forget April 2010 – the competitors and jury were stranded across the world.

“We had to rip up the script and everything had to be delayed by 48 hours, although we could not change the final night as the King of Norway would be in attendance.

“Half of the competitors were in Frankfurt, some went to Paris, some came by boat and others by car.

“Xiang Yu, who was studying in Boston, went to Iceland but could not get on a plane to Norway and got stuck. He eventually got on a transport plane and went on to win!”

Gordon added: “The Menuhin Competition is special as it's more like a festival and it is nomadic, so



The Back family: From left, Tristan, Anna, Erika, Gordon and Adam with Angus the golden retriever

every time it reinvents itself. We have a small team who work in London and the host city adds a separate team. The next competition will be hosted in Geneva from April 12-22, 2018.

“I find working in different countries gives you creative energy. We form collaborations and incorporate the national identity of the host city.

“One of Yehudi Menuhin's wishes was to make it an international experience, so competitors are enriched by new places and meeting new people. It's a melting pot of talent that extends past the competition.

“In London 2016, 38 countries were represented. Rennosuke Fukuda, from Japan, and Kerson Leong, from Canada, played in the Lark-supported former prizewinners' concert. They loved being on stage together and got on like a house on fire.

“In cities like Oslo, London and Geneva there are many arts organisations but they tend to work separately. One of our strengths is bringing them together to create an incredibly successful event.

“We try to add new aspects to each competition and although it is hard to continually ‘up the game’ we do it. We are trailblazers!”

Visit menuhincompetition.org

Cherishing life

Despite huge work commitments, a heart procedure at the end of 2016 has made Gordon re-evaluate his life.

He said: “I had never been unwell and thought I was invincible so this blip made me realise what is important and that's my family; my wife Erika and my three children – Adam, Tristan and Anna.

“I met Erika during my first job accompanying Menuhin's masterclasses at the Guildhall, in London in 1974. We married at Christmas in 1979 and since then we've lived in the same house in North London.

“It's something I may have taken for granted, but I am very lucky, my whole life and career just sort of happened without a plan and now I realise how amazing it is.”



Out & About

with Isabella Valentini

Lark Musical Instruments Division

During my travels on behalf of the Lark Music team I have found so much to celebrate in this fascinating world of music – a summer highlight was to witness the future of violin making looking very bright!

After an invitation from client Jan Spidlen we were proud to support the Venceslav Metelka Society's fifth International Violin Making Competition, in Prague, which required contestants to submit a new instrument modelled on an instrument by Antonio Stradivari.

The competitors also had 12 hours to carve a scroll during the competition at the Czech Museum of Music.

The competition was judged by a panel of professionals – Peter Beare, Patrick Robin and Silvio Levaggi – and the competitors also marked each other's work. Peter, who is based in Kent, explained that alongside artistry and workmanship, the technical precision, quality of ground and varnish plus tonal quality were taken into consideration. The judging panel gave lectures throughout the week and competitors hung on their every word, eager to learn.

The competition was punctuated with music including a lecture recital by violinist Jaroslav Svenceny who played on a Stradivari and a Guarneri violin.

Lark hosted a fabulous boat party where competition organiser Dalibor Bzirký and his folk band entertained guests. There was so much dancing that it felt like a party with old friends. We really enjoyed meeting existing clients and making new friends, too.

The gala and prize-giving night featured a recital by Pavel Sporel and the competition winner Piotr Pielaszek, 25, from Pozna in Poland, was announced. Piotr, who now lives in Angers, France, started violin making at 16.

His father is a violin maker his grandfather was a music and accordion teacher.

Piotr told me his ambition is to create instruments that 'will not only be able to win competitions, but please and inspire musicians'. He is clearly moving in the right direction, being awarded a medal for the best-sounding instrument at the H. Wieniawski competition in Pozna and receiving a silver medal for workmanship at Cleveland's VSA competition.

It was moving to watch Pavel Sporel performing a Paganini Caprice on the winning violin and the spirit of the competition was summed up by newcomer Maarten de Keukeleire, 23, from Belgium, who said the competition was a 'very big experience' for him.

He told me: "I liked how everybody seemed to know everybody in this small world of luthiers. It was the first Stradivari violin I had made so it was an experience about gaining knowledge and making new friends. I went home with a head full of ideas. The competition is much more than winning or losing. It's about gaining knowledge and friendship which also made me a winner."

The atmosphere was truly special and witnessing the support between competitors made the Lark team feel that the future of violin making is in good hands!

Isabella

Isabella Valentini read music at the University of Birmingham before working as a freelance soprano and singing teacher. She joined the music team last summer where she works as an Account Handler.

Below left: Lark team Gemma Deavall, Fay Watts and Isabella on the party boat. Right, Piotr Pielaszek



Interested in joining a Lark Music event? Please contact isabella.valentini@larkinsurance.co.uk

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