

# Music making in Alton



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# Alton Prom Review

Making history in creating the future....

Hilary McEwan put it very eloquently when she said "Wouldn't it be wonderful if...." – and that was how it all started. In the blink of an eye, a long-term aspiration to do a joint concert with primary and secondary schools in the Alton area had leapt from the project drawing board into rehearsals for "Fingal's Cave" and "Little Suite". Fingal was easy, of course (*Editor's note: I think this is sarcasm!*) – everyone knows the tune and, even if the fingers didn't quite keep up, it was simple enough to catch up at a familiar bit! Richard Rodney Bennett provided a few more challenges with his Little Suite. How does the tune go? Is it really meant to sound like that? Should I beat in 1 or 3? (Graham – "I can't possibly beat in 3 – my arm will drop off!").

Howard Moody was commissioned as guest conductor for the extravaganza, and he joined us for a joint rehearsal with Amery Hill and Eggars – there was only just enough room in the hall to sit everyone down, let alone leave space for the roller coaster couple of hours we were in for. Poor Graham – turning over his Orchestra must have been a bit like handing over the keys of your prized car to a complete stranger and inviting them to take it for spin! The kids from Amery and Eggars fitted in amazingly – they must have worked so hard to prepare. Several were showing us a thing or two, and they were all wonderfully cool about the whole affair.



Howard was fascinating to work with – but I suspect a complete contrast to anyone any of us had worked with before. The orchestral exercises raised more than a few eyebrows – *what* was he trying to achieve?

Suddenly though, as if by magic, those complex rhythms started to drop into place. Well done Howard for breaking us away from comfort and tradition – you could see the exchanged glances and reticence as he invited us to sing our rhythms – but it worked, and over the course of the hour Fingal was stirring in his cave. Over to Hilary McEwan for the Little Suite, who was struggling with a lost voice after singing all day with the junior choirs – but she did a brilliant job of putting some life on the bones of the music, introducing the words that made the music make sense. Was it just me, or did she beat in 3!! Over too soon though – the next time we were to meet was a joint rehearsal the day before the concert – and add the choir in to the equation.



Saturday. Amery Hill sports hall. Penultimate rehearsal. HOW MANY children in the choir??!! Another great morning's work – Howard was up to his tricks again – this time getting the whole choir to conduct the orchestra, count us in and play musical games. It was a clever way of keeping them involved and breaking down any nerves they may have had about singing with an orchestra. Not that we saw many nerves, other than a few frazzled teachers!

I think that Fingal was saving his energy on Saturday morning, he seemed reluctant to come out of his cave – apart from the odd growl, but the juniors sang with great gusto when their turn came, having been very patient whilst we tried to shake Fingal! (Who said he was sure it would be all right on the night?!)



## Alton Prom Review (Continued)

Sunday afternoon. The Anvil, and we managed to bluff our way past the security guard at the stage entrance to find dressing rooms and run through the final stage management bits of the concert. Find a seat, find a stand, and listen to the choir as they sang their other pieces accompanied by members of the Sarum Orchestra.

Hilary was amazingly athletic as she leapt up into the galleries to encourage the children to sing out – the music and singing fitted together really well, the only worry was whether the kids could be heard at the back. Surely adrenalin on the night will carry it through? Fingal seemed to agree, and flexed his muscles ready for the oncoming audience at his cave.



Then, as quickly as it had started, it was over. The stage was handed back to the stagehands and the artistes made their final preparations in the dressing rooms. Did all those bulbs around the mirror really help in tying the bow tie first time? Collect instruments, check music, spare reed – all set. Now where is stage right??

Any doubts or moments of panic Hilary and her project team may have experienced were quickly dispelled – the Anvil was absolutely full, and the children on the edge of their seats ready to perform.

Fingal went really well – he had clearly been saving his energy for the night, and really played to the crowd. All the work on rhythms and listening to each other playing came together and provided a wonderfully atmospheric and dramatic opening to the concert.

What a difference it makes playing in a hall designed for the acoustics of an orchestra, rather than containing a game of 5-a-side football! The wonderful soaring crescendos disappeared up into the galleries, evoking thoughts of the storm outside the cave, and then returned quietened as the storm receded, Howard guiding us expertly around the rocks and into calm water. Our young companions in the Orchestra did us proud, never missing a beat. The audience were enthusiastic with their applause – off to a good start!

It was time for the choir to show off their prowess in the Little Suite. “Oh” sang the Linnet – right on cue – with a perfect entry and, as hoped, adrenalin seemed to carry their voices over the orchestra. All 5 movements flew by effortlessly, the kids really rising to the challenge.

Hilary worked the choir superbly, her infectious enthusiasm capturing the spirit of the children – the smiles on their faces said it all. Little Suite was another hit, but sadly was the last piece for ACO, although we were lucky enough to be stuck on stage to be treated to a selection from “Singbook”, a set of jazzy innovative pieces for the choir, accompanied by John Surman, Howard Moody and members of the Sarum Orchestra.

By now the choir were really into their stride, and if anything changed up a gear in response to the fun jazz provided by the band. For me, a lasting image was the young lady from Treloars who joined Howard at the piano in one of the pieces. The sheer joy on her face captured the whole spirit of the evening.

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# Alton Prom Review (Continued)

For the second half, ACO relocated to the stalls, and a prime viewing position for the premier of John Surman's innovative new work "Points of Departure", commissioned by Amery Hill especially for the Alton Proms.

Lights down on an empty stage and, to a haunting backing track, John Surman started the performance with a stunning soprano sax solo from the very top of the upper circle. Slowly he made his way down through the audience towards the stage and, as he passed the circle entrances, was joined one by one by the combined Amery Hill and Eggars bands. In a real Pied Piper of Hamlyn moment, John led the players down to the stage, the sound building as each instrument joined in and walked, playing, down to the stage until once they were all seated, Howard stepped in and brought the introduction to an awesome climax. That was to set the tone for the next 40 minutes. John switched to Baritone sax and treated us to an effortless display of musical mastery and inspiration, accompanied by the bands.

Amazingly, as the piece developed, Howard and John introduced many of the children to stand up and play their own mini-solo. They were all brilliant, but young trumpeter Laura Jurd from Amery (who also runs her own jazz band "Jazzmanian Devils") was outstanding, surely a major talent of the future.

After a breathtaking series of interlinked movements, highlighting every section of the band, and displaying some dazzling virtuoso performances from John and his team, the piece ended as it had started, with the Pied Piper leading his children off into the distance, finishing with the haunting soprano sax fading into the gallery.

It was an amazing evening of music. Howard Moody had said backstage shortly before walking on, that we were making history that night. He was absolutely right, but in involving so many of our children in fabulous music making we were inspiring the musicians of the future, and keeping music alive for our children's children.

Well done to all involved – and thanks especially to Graham for preparing us so well, and to the committee for having the courage to buy in to the vision that made our evening at the Anvil such a memorable success.

**Bill Dawson**



## Diary

No rehearsal – half term		31 <sup>st</sup> May 2006
Concert at Treloar School	7:30 pm	28 <sup>th</sup> June 2006
Last Rehearsal before Summer Break	7:30pm	12 <sup>th</sup> July 2006
First Rehearsal after Summer Break	7:30pm	6 <sup>th</sup> September 2006
Listen Up! Concert at The Maltings, Alton	7:30pm	7 <sup>th</sup> October 2006
Christmas Concert at Four Marks	7:30pm	9 <sup>th</sup> December 2006
National Childbirth Trust Christmas Concert At The Harvest Church	6.00 pm	16 <sup>th</sup> December 2006



## Player Profile – Ellie Rivers

My father's father played the piano for silent movies which is how he met his wife, who sang. My mother had piano lessons from William Cole (remember those little white music theory books?), and, as far as I can make out, spent the war playing piano duets with her father, oh, and being nice to soldiers shipped into the Dorking area from Leytonstone – lucky Dad got invited home for tea. They married after the war and sang in numerous choirs, being conducted by the likes of Vaughan Williams.

My two older sisters are very musical – so much so that my parents were convinced I had something seriously wrong with me when at the age of three, I *still* couldn't sing in tune. Both of my sisters had scholarships to the junior department of the Royal College of Music, and I hoped to follow suit. I idolised my next sister up who played the bassoon, so when I had to choose a second instrument, apart from the piano, the closest thing to the bassoon I knew of was the oboe.

I spent nearly eight years at the RCM and had a wonderful musical grounding. Theory lessons were obligatory. I learnt both the piano and the oboe and rose to the dizzy heights of the second orchestra (there were four altogether at that time) but then was dropped like a hot potato into a rather fine wind ensemble when I admitted that I was planning to study English at University. My scholarship also obliged me to play in the Surrey Youth Orchestra, which, at that time, was not a vibrant group... After my grade VIII I had lessons with a viola playing teacher who worked with me in partnership. We played duets, including the Bach double and I learned so much more by imitation and at long last fell in love with the oboe and all its timbres.

My father persuaded me that I should put something back into the community that was, after all, paying for my music education. So against my better judgement I responded to a request from a baroque enthusiast to spend bleak Sunday afternoons playing duets with him on his recorder. What is it about recorder players which enables them to extract so much pleasure from playing *every* repeat? And how is it that they never seem to need to breathe?

I had far more fun and learned a lot from playing every Thursday with the Brockham Village Chamber Orchestra. This was the baby of, Basil, a local QC, nearing retirement, and then consisted of his aged friends. He opened up his house to us (literally, when we grew too big, he knocked down a wall to make a larger room) and would conduct us standing in his carpet slippers on an upturned orange box. We rarely did concerts – too much flap – but instead rattled through a huge amount of music. Thanks to Basil I have played all of the Brandenburg concertos, most of the main baroque and classical orchestral repertoire and much else besides.

At Nottingham University I answered an advertisement from a physics PhD student wanting to play quintets.

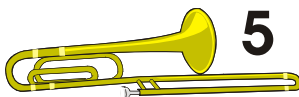
We met at the dead of night in a deserted physics lab amongst the gas taps and happily murdered all the wind quintets we could find.

My next orchestral experience came a few years later when I was working for Methuen and living in north London. Haringey Symphony Orchestra was large, and thanks to the large and militantly gay women of the brass section, ebullient. At first I shared the second oboe part with Tony, an elderly Indian man, who fast became a good friend. We used to practice at his house, eating samosas, which did nothing for our reeds. I knew the writing was on the wall when the first oboe rang me up to tell me about her new job and I could hear sheep in the background. My debut was in Brahms 1 with a solo of cross-rhythms so complex I could only get through it by blocking out the violins altogether and getting Tony to whisper, '1, 2' as I played. With HSO I added most of the Romantic greats to my repertoire, including Strauss' *Konzertstück* for four horns, which was memorable. Concerts always included a concerto, our soloists often being the latest Young Musician of the Year. So I have played with Nigel Kennedy, Emma Johnson, Anna Markham...

Back down to earth, I met John and had our two daughters, Jenny and Clare. Playing my oboe suddenly became impossible – if I did, Jenny would burst into tears and cry, 'Put that tube away!' I was further discouraged by the fact that I had had my oboe stolen and its replacement is (still) rather temperamental. So John and I joined Crouch End Festival Chorus and learnt a lot of the fantastic twentieth century choral repertoire, including Britten's *War Requiem*.

Ten years later found us in Petersfield. Once a week I drove Jenny's cello and Clare's violin to school and hung around while they were rehearsing in the school orchestra. I asked if I could play too. Thus Petersfield Community Orchestra was born. Then my oboe lost its top register. I found a repair man in Froxfield and left it with him for a week. Meanwhile, Chris Leggett had also taken his oboe to him to be repaired. He saw my oboe case and slipped a note in it about Alton Orchestra...and here I am.

**Ellie Rivers**



# Player Profile -Reg Charlick

## “Incomers Welcome!”

One fine summer’s evening I strolled across the paved path with a lady whose name was Chris. She carried a violin as did I. This was my first rehearsal with the Alton Concert Orchestra.

I had recently seen the article in the local paper that the ACO were having an Open Evening. At that time I wasn’t aware that ACO existed! I contacted Graham and he invited me along to the next rehearsal.

So here I was. I had my name taken and sat down. Several members around me said “hello” and “pleased to see you”. Graham prepared to start the rehearsal, and told the Orchestra that Reginald Charlick had come along to join and hoped he would stay with us.

After this friendly introduction, I struggled through my first Big Band item and a few other numbers! I left with Mac Newton, the Leader, who described the fundamental differences playing this type of music, especially the accidentals! I took note of his advice and soon found out how important this information was!

After three years with the ACO we had played two concerts at the Treloar School in front of the disabled children who have such a wonderful talent overcoming so many difficulties. I also came across to play in St Lawrence Church, sitting behind the pulpit struggling with Bach! I am not really an “Incomer” but more of a long lost friend!

Last December, at the concert in The Maltings, the ACO gave me my best birthday present I have ever had when the choirs and others sang “Happy Birthday Reg” in the key of ‘C’, and afterwards everyone wishing me a Happy Birthday. My family and I would like to thank all of ACO for this unexpected event – it will never be forgotten.

### Brief Historical Note:

I had been given my violin for my 7<sup>th</sup> birthday and played in school assembly, concerts and later with the Tywardreath and Cornwall Youth orchestras. I left school at 13+ and at 16 started as an apprentice with The Great Western Railway. I moved to Swindon when 19 subsequently worked on most of the Kings and Castles engines. While there, I played with the Railway Orchestra. I also played violin and mouth organ at Camp Fires as I was a Scout Leader for many years – I tried the bagpipes but that didn’t work out!

I met Dorothy during a Guide Camp in Cornwall when she bandaged my thumb and I still have the scar! I moved to London and into the Design Office for London Transport. I played with the LTPB Orchestra and others. Eventually after several moves, I became a qualified Engineer gaining my HND etc.

Then in 1954 I came to ‘rest’ in Basingstoke. Here, I joined Thorneycrofts and the Basingstoke Orchestral Society and became the Secretary for over 30 years. I have now played with them for about 50 years and never missed a concert! I also play each week in the Deane Sinfonia. My final employment was with UKAEA and I retired in 1990.

From Steam Engines to Nuclear Engineering – it all seems to have happened very quickly!

**Reg Charlick**



# The World According to our Conductor Part II

Our Assistant Conductor, David Budd, has been taught well by Graham – including the interesting turns of phrase to get his meaning across during rehearsal.

The following are the sayings of David as witnessed by the cello section!

- ❖ Do my dah dahs make any sense whatsoever?
- ❖ ugm
- ❖ I think we have an approximation in the flutes
- ❖ That should be a relief
- ❖ It gets a bit slacky
- ❖ Ooh that was that *piano* that just went past
- ❖ Before we lose it completely
- ❖ um ba da ba da ba da ba da
- ❖ Don't worry about playing it out of tune!!!!!!!
- ❖ THE CELLOS ARE MY FAVOURITE SECTION! (I think that was what he said -R)

And just so Graham didn't think he was let off the hook while Rachel was away...

- ❖ You need to put your wind instruments to your mouths unless you have another means of playing them
- ❖ Make sure you include crescendos and diminuendos in the windy bits
- ❖ Yes please to school uniforms
- ❖ Sounds like it could strip paint off a gas thingy

**Rachel Pritchard**

## Thinking of Joining Us?

**We meet in the Drama Studio at Amery Hill School every Wednesday  
(except in school holidays)  
from 7.30 to 9.30 pm**

The cost of joining is, £5 for students and £10 for adults, per term. We always welcome new players to the orchestra – there is no audition required to join and we do not insist on you attending every rehearsal. If you are thinking of joining then please contact one of the following:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Telephone Number</b>	<b>Position</b>
Graham Cross	(01420) 562234	Conductor
Chris Leggett	(01730) 893032	Chairman
Mac Newton	(01962) 773130	Secretary

Or visit our website: [www.altonconcertorchestra.org.uk](http://www.altonconcertorchestra.org.uk)

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