

# The Nash

Newsletter of "The Friends of the National Youth Orchestra of Wales" November 2009  
Registered Charity No. 1,053,788

## In Brief

Some years ago Helena Braithwaite wrote an article about the lack of funding for music education in Wales compared with England and Scotland. It painted a rather depressing picture of the attitude of the Welsh Assembly Government to the issue. However earlier this year the matter was addressed by Jane Hutt, Education Minister, and we are grateful to have Helena report on progress.

See page 4.

We had hoped to publish at least one article in Welsh in this edition, unfortunately all that we were able to get was a translation of Matthew Jones's piece and space was not available to accommodate it all. We would, however, welcome views of Friends on how best to include Welsh in the Newsletter. If you have any views or ideas we would be delighted to hear from you. The contact address is printed at the bottom of this page.

This year's collaboration with BBCNOW took a very different form from the usual symphony concert. The programme was themed, designed to attract a younger audience with music associated with Halloween. In fact the concert was given the title *Halloween Spectacular*. Once again Grant Llewellyn was the conductor. On page 2 there is a report from NYOW oboist Bethany Elliott. The photographs of the event are by Brian Tarr.

## The Summer Course 2009

Matthew Jones, Youth Music Manager



A standing ovation at the Sage, Gateshead

2009 was the longest course and concert tour since I took over as Manager, but was also thoroughly enjoyable. Three new tutors joined us for the initial rehearsal period in Lampeter; Paul Edmund Davies (joint principal flute of the Philharmonia), Graham King (Percussionist at Covent Garden) and NYOW alumnus Ian Balmain (Principal Trumpet at Covent Garden) all fitted in seamlessly with our usual tutors as they fully prepared the Orchestra for Owain's arrival mid course.

Owain and the Orchestra spent one of their rehearsal days recording for an S4C documentary on the music of Arwel Hughes; 'Tydi a Roddaist', which was broadcast in October. The now traditional pre tour concert in Lampeter's Main Arts Hall was again well attended by the residents of Lampeter and parents alike, with the evening's student led Cabaret Night a fitting conclusion to the rehearsal period.

The concert tour started at Aberystwyth Arts Centre before moving onto Prichard-Jones Hall in Bangor and then to the Adrian Boult Hall in Birmingham. Both Welsh concerts were well attended but the Birmingham concert was again disappointing, though riots in the centre of the

city sparked by a BNP rally were thought to have affected any potential walk up audience we might have attracted.

The second part of the tour started with a debut performance at the fantastic Sage Gateshead. The journey was worth the wait, with the members thoroughly enjoying playing in a cutting edge hall with almost 350 very appreciative audience members. It was lovely to see Kathryn Webber and Beryl Jones among a handful of dedicated followers who had made the long journey from Wales - their attendance was very much appreciated.

We spent the next day travelling down from Gateshead to Hereford, where after four concerts in a row and a ten hour journey the Orchestra had a well deserved night off. However this respite was short lived as we entered the final day where they not only performed a morning concert at a packed Hereford Cathedral, as part of the Three Choirs Festival, but also had to perform an evening concert at St David's Hall with an audience of almost 1000 giving an instantaneous standing ovation. Just rewards for the young musicians who once again proved that the World's longest standing National Youth Orchestra is something to be very proud of

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# BBC NOW / NYOW Collaboration 2009

Bethany Elliot (oboe)



Bethany playing at the Halloween Spooktacular

The collaboration between the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and the National Youth Orchestra of Wales was definitely an experience never to be forgotten. A few weeks before the course, the repertoire and the details were finalised. I must say to begin with, I felt sceptical about the course, thinking it was going to be a weekend playing 'cheese', dressed up as skeletons!! To a certain extent, this, in fact, is what it was. However, it was so much more challenging and fun than I thought it'd be. The repertoire was a lot harder than it looked, and because we were playing with a professional orchestra, we were expected to play it all to a high standard. Pieces like the *Sorcerer's Apprentice* were technically very difficult, yet other pieces were a real test of stamina, *The Ghostbuster's* being a good example! On a more personal level, I was asked by the principal oboe player in the BBC NOW to play one of the main

solos of the concert – the theme from *Swan Lake*. I was so petrified, yet the professional players were so supportive. It was a real encouragement to know that the principal oboe and Grant Llewelyn trusted me enough to do it in the actual concert!

In terms of the concert itself, it was such good fun. I loved seeing the children's faces light up with excitement, especially when there were characters such as Batman and the Cyberman from *DR WHO* exploring the hall. I have to say my personal favourite was NYOW's very own Matt Jones dressed as a very pink panther!!

All in all, the Halloween Spooktacular, was an unforgettable concert. The combination of the music, the lighting, the crazy concert dress and the staff/children in fancy dress made the concert entertaining for the audience and everyone involved. It was definitely a night to remember!



Grant Llewellyn and the assembled forces

## Concert Review

Gareth Tudor,

Committee member and father of Elin a current member of NYOW

I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to attend two of the concerts performed by the National Youth Orchestra of Wales this summer. The first concert was at the Arts centre in Aberystwyth on a sunny August evening, a rare glimpse of sunshine in an otherwise disappointing summer as far as the weather was concerned. The National Youth Orchestra however under the baton of Owain Arwel Hughes did not disappoint in any way.

Arwel Hughes' *Prelude for Orchestra* (dedicated to the youth of Wales), Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake Ballet Suite* and Mahler's *Symphony No.1* was an attractive but challenging programme particularly for woodwind and brass soloists. Even though this was the first concert after leaving their rehearsal venue at Lampeter, I felt the Orchestra put on a mature and polished performance. The audience of over 240 were treated to some very accomplished playing particularly from a young woodwind section. I felt the concert at St. David's Hall was a significant achievement for such a young orchestra. I must admit to having some doubt about the decision to perform two concerts on the same day, particularly with the travelling involved between the venues at Hereford and Cardiff. However I must say that I could not have been more wrong and my doubts disappeared as soon as the orchestra began to play. The energetic and exciting performance delighted the audience. The young musicians produced musicality of the high standard we have come to expect from this orchestra with impressive woodwind playing in *Swan Lake* and the brass section in the Mahler. There was also sensitive string playing in the Arwel Hughes *Prelude for Orchestra* and particularly in the slow movement of the Mahler symphony. The concert ended with a well deserved standing ovation.

In discussion with audience members from the other venues I understand that these high standards were maintained throughout the tour. The Orchestra, its conductor and all the tutorial staff involved should be congratulated for a fantastic series of concerts. Well done to all concerned.

## The 2009 Course in Pictures



Owain Arwel Hughes presents the Friends of NYOW prize for the most promising string player to Sebastian Pennar, principal double bass. Seb is from Cardiff and has been a member of the orchestra since 2005. He is studying at the Royal College of Music in London.



Muriel Lewis, Vice Chairman of the Friends, presenting the David Harris prize for most promising cellist to principal cellist Steffan Morris. This is a new prize given by Muriel in memory of her late husband, David Harris, also a cellist in the Nash. Steffan is from Neath and studies at the Yehudi Menuhin School.



The youngest member of the orchestra, twelve year old oboist Tom Blomfield from Flintshire.



This year's fancy dress theme was as usual linked to the repertoire. As Mahler's First Symphony is known as the Titan, the theme was Greek mythology.

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## A Letter from a Leaver

Dear Mr Jones,

Now is the time to reflect over the years of being a member of the National Youth Orchestra of Wales, from becoming a member for the first time six years ago to the Halloween Spooktacular. To become a player in the orchestra for the first time was exciting and privileged, but I did not realise the high standard of musicianship and professional attitude that was demanded and enjoyed for the orchestra to attain the high regard in which it is held.

The experience and the friendships which have been forged by being a member are priceless and mean so much to me. Every tour each year as I look back has something special to remind me of many wonderful occasions.

Thank you for including me to play in Ischia and the wonderful collaborations with the BBC Orchestra. Thank you for your kindness and courtesy at all times.

My very best wishes, Ruth Llewelin

# From the Archives - the Early Years

Kathryn Webber, Chairperson of the Friends

Reading through the newspaper cuttings of the first decade of the Nash's existence one is struck by the reporters' and music critics' sense of wonder that young people can play together to such a high standard. At that time a youth orchestra was still an unusual thing and after all the Nash was the first in Europe if not the world! I hope readers will enjoy a few snippets.

1947

"But the schools and clubs of Glamorgan have provided the largest part of the orchestra. Indeed Merthyr and the Rhondda have proved a tower of strength in the brass section owing to the brass band tradition being so strong in those areas. Dr Raybould described them (*NYOW*) as "a fine lot of talent". (Western Mail)

1950

"When he (*Dr Raybould*) returned from Washington, where he had been conducting a special gala concert in honour of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the

founding of the city, specially to take charge of the Youth Orchestra, he brought greetings and goodwill to the Welsh youngsters from the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington, the members of which had heard of the National Youth Orchestra with interest." (South Wales Evening Post)

1951

"Audience reaction was reflected by cries of "Encore" at the Festival of Britain concert by the 114 strong Welsh National Youth Orchestra at Wrexham last night. The orchestra was led for the first time by a woman, Miss Leila Palmer aged 19 who comes from Solva, Pembrokeshire." (Western Mail)

1955

"Bangor Magistrates yesterday regretted not having the power to give three Teddy boys, who had beaten up two members of the Welsh National Youth Orchestra in Bangor on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, the birch." (Liverpool Daily Post)

"Dr Raybould reminded his players at rehearsal yesterday, (*before they departed for the Edinburgh Festival*) "Play carefully, remember that members of the New York Philharmonic and the Berlin Philharmonic (*also appearing at the Festival*) will probably be in the audience, and you've got to show them".

"A mutter from the trumpets.

"Did you say something?"

"I said "Hear, hear," Sir" replied the young musician with great presence of mind.

"Either I don't believe you or I agree with you" Dr Raybould shoots back at him – but there's a smile with it and the orchestra sweep back into some exciting Massenet, and play all the better for it.

"And that, of course, is the trick which Dr Raybould works so well with these youngsters ... plenty of tact, plenty of good humour and firm control. Dr Raybould has that and so too does Director of Studies, Irwyn Walters." (South Wales Argus)

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## Developments in Music Education in Wales

### The National Singing Strategy and Music Review

Helena Braithwaite, former Music Advisor for South Glamorgan and Education Officer with BBC NOW

Since 2004 and the demise of the Music Development Fund I have been lobbying the Assembly Government to increase the support for music in schools. In April 2009 Emyr Wyn Jones, Chairman of the Welsh Music Advisors and I were invited to meet Jane Hutt the Minister for Education, and she was sympathetic to our cause.

Recently a National Strategy for Singing in schools has been announced. Fewer and fewer Primary teachers are being trained to teach music and therefore the Education Department of the Assembly has launched a pilot programme of support for schools. This will provide training in the teaching of singing for Primary

teachers and also provide new materials for singing.

Up until the early 90s the proportion of pupils learning instruments in Wales was double that in England. However this declined sharply in the late 90s. The Music development Fund stopped this decline and indeed instrumental and vocal tuition increased. Once the MDF was cut and the ring fencing of the remaining finance taken away, instrumental provision in Wales became very uneven, depending on the generosity of the local authority. The first step in developing a robust system of music provision is to find out exactly what is happening right across Wales. It has finally been agreed that there will be a Na-

tional Music Review and a series of meetings have begun with representatives of music educationalists throughout Wales. Questionnaires will go to all music teachers, learners, Directors of Education and Governors. We hope that the replies will give us a true picture of the state of music in our classrooms and in extra curricula music.

Once this is completed we hope it will form the basis for a National Music Strategy which will give all children in Wales the opportunity to make music. All this will take time and there has been no discussion about finance to implement the strategy, but at least it is a start.