

The Nash



Newsletter of the Friends of the National Youth Orchestra of Wales

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www.fnyow.cymru

August 2024

Welcome: Hywel Jones (Chair of the Friends of NYOW)



Welcome to the Summer 2024 edition of the newsletter of the Friends of the National Youth Orchestra of Wales. I'm delighted to offer this word of welcome since it is Hannah Roberts' first newsletter as editor. I am very grateful to Hannah for agreeing to undertake this role. At the same time, I thank John Watkins for his sterling work as editor of countless newsletters over the years. Thanks John and Hannah!

You will receive this newsletter just before the NYOW's summer course and concert tour get under way during the second half of August. Concert details are provided below. It would be great if we could meet up at one or more of the venues - do come up and say hello!

The purpose of the Friends of the Nash is twofold. We exist to raise funds to support the NYOW financially. We also aim to provide a network for past members to keep in touch with both the orchestra and with each other. As 2026 fast approaches and the OLDEST national youth orchestra in the world prepares to celebrate its 80th anniversary I would like to appeal to all of us Friends to spread the word amongst family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances in order to expand this network of alumni and supporters of the orchestra over the next two years and invite them to become members of our family. Why not simply draw their attention to the website and our new Instagram account? All details are at the end of the newsletter.

We are in regular discussions with the orchestra's administrators, National Youth Arts Wales (NYAW) as to how we can develop the relationship between our two organisations with a specific focus on making 2026 a year to remember. In this newsletter you will have an opportunity to get to know the inspirational chief executive of NYAW, Evan Dawson.

We remember in this edition Beryl James, a true friend of the NYOW. Beryl will be well known to many of the Friends by virtue of her chronicling of the NYOW's first 50 years in her book 'First in the World - The story of the National Youth Orchestra of Wales'. This will be an important source of archive material as we approach the 80th anniversary celebrations.

I am also grateful to Chris Hill for his article. Chris and I go back a long way to the Pembrokeshire Schools Orchestra, The Dyfed Schools Orchestra and the NYOW of the 1970s. If you are inspired like Chris to put pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard in similar fashion, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Hannah.

About the Editor



I am delighted to have taken on the role of Editor of the Friends of the National Youth Orchestra of Wales newsletter. I hope you enjoy this edition as much as I have enjoyed putting it together. I realise I have very big shoes to fill, having long admired John Watkins' wonderful newsletters, and before him, my Dad, John Roberts, who was Editor until he passed away in 2012. It must run in the family! I am enormously grateful to John, Hywel, and Denise for their tremendous support and contributions to this edition.

I joined the Friends just over two years ago after attending many Nash concerts and a fabulous fundraising evening of music-making at the Acapela Studio in Pentyrch, hosted by prolific musician and fellow committee member Wyn Davies. I was then delighted to follow in my Dad's footsteps and join the lovely and very friendly committee shortly after.

Music and the arts are incredibly important to me both professionally and personally. After completing a Music Degree at Leeds University, I worked as a fundraiser for Opera North for over 10 years before happily returning to Wales in 2011 to work as a freelance fundraiser with organisations including Ensemble Cymru and the English Symphony Orchestra. For the past 10 years, I have worked in the Marketing and Communications team at Howell's School in Llandaff, where I also enjoy playing with the school orchestra and singing in the staff choir. I am a keen amateur violinist (though my audition for the Nash didn't go to plan!) and love playing with the Gwent Chamber Orchestra, founded by my Dad and John Watkins nearly forty years ago. I also enjoy singing (albeit badly!) with my local choir, Canton Chorus, and am excited to tackle Brahms' German Requiem next term.

In future editions of the newsletter, I would love to hear from you! Whether you have cherished memories from your time in the National Youth Orchestra of Wales or updates on what you're doing now, please share your stories and photographs with me at hannahrobwales@icloud.com. I would be delighted to include them in our next newsletter or on our new Instagram account: [@nyowfriends!](https://www.instagram.com/nyowfriends/)

Exciting Summer Concert Series by the National Youth Orchestra of Wales

We are thrilled to remind you about the National Youth Orchestra of Wales' summer concert series. This year, the orchestra will perform five spectacular concerts, and we hope you can join us for one or more of these memorable events.

Programme:

- Niamh O'Donnell: "Five Windows"
- Stravinsky: The Firebird Suite (1945)
- Prokofiev: Romeo and Juliet (a selection)

The esteemed Tianyi Lu will be conducting this year. Tianyi is well-known and admired in Wales, having studied for her Master of Music and Orchestral Conducting at RWCMD. During her time in Cardiff, she directed several professional and amateur orchestras. Tianyi has since achieved international recognition, conducting many top orchestras in Britain and abroad. The NYOW members are sure to thrive under her guidance in this exceptional programme.



Concert Schedule:

- Wednesday, 28 August 2024, 7:00 pm: UWTSD Lampeter Campus (Dress Rehearsal)
- Thursday, 29 August 2024, 7:30 pm: Prichard Jones Hall, Bangor
- Friday, 30 August 2024, 7:30 pm: St. David's Cathedral
- Saturday, 31 August 2024, 3:30 pm: All Nations' Centre, Cardiff (Relaxed Concert)
- Sunday, 1 September 2024, 3:00 pm: Brangwyn Hall, Swansea

Please note that due to ongoing restoration work, there will be no concert at St David's Hall, Cardiff this year. Instead, the final concert will be held at Brangwyn Hall, Swansea. The concert at the All Nations' Centre in Cardiff will be a relaxed and accessible performance featuring excerpts from the full programme.

For more information and to purchase tickets, please visit the NYAW website: <https://www.nyaw.org.uk/whats-on>.

We look forward to seeing you at one of the concerts!

Beryl James



It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of Beryl James, a former Nash member and Friends Committee member, who died in April this year. We extend our heartfelt condolences to her husband, Howard, as well as to her friends and family.

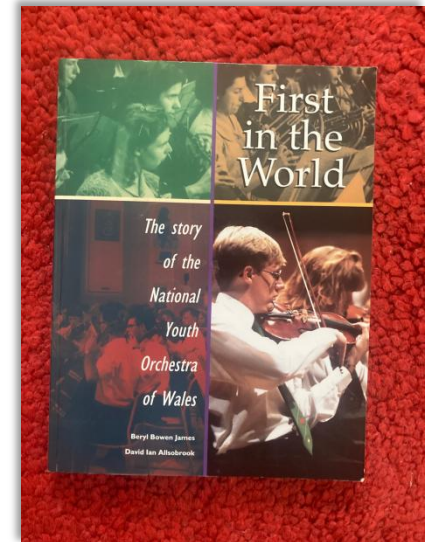
Beryl was not only a talented musician but also a qualified pharmacist, and she earned a Master's Degree in Education from Cardiff University as a mature student.

Coming from a musical family, Beryl's father, Percy Bowen, was a clarinettist who won the gold medal in the woodwind section at the National Eisteddfod in Pontypool in 1924. Her sister, Betty, also a clarinettist, was a founding member of Irwyn Walters' first Youth Orchestra, which held its inaugural concert at Monmouth School in 1946. Betty later played with the Liverpool Philharmonic.

Beryl, an accomplished oboist, joined the Youth Orchestra in 1951 under the direction of Clarence Raybould. She fondly recalled playing second oboe to the renowned Leon Goossens at Llandaff Cathedral, who personally congratulated her on her performance—a moment of great pride for her. Beryl dedicated many years to teaching the oboe at Monmouth School, Howell's School Llandaff, and several other schools in Cardiff. Among her students was the future Hollywood star Ioan Gruffudd.

One of Beryl's important contributions to the orchestra was the publication in 1995 of the book '**First in the World - The story of the National Youth Orchestra of Wales**'. Beryl co-authored the book with David Ian Allsobrook, former lecturer in the History of Education at University College Cardiff. The significance of the book's title must never be forgotten, since the Nash was the VERY FIRST national youth orchestra in the world. The book contains two appendices, the first being a list of the names of the founder members of the first orchestra in 1946 and the second is a list of some 4000 names of members from the early 1950s to 1990. This is a fascinating story of the first half century of what the authors describe as 'the most important development in music in Wales' during that time, that is 'the flowering of instrumental talent'.

Beryl's contributions to music and education will be fondly remembered and deeply missed by all who knew her.



Evan Dawson - Chief Executive of National Youth Arts Wales

Evan joined National Youth Arts Wales in October 2023. He is a Welsh-speaker, a qualified lawyer and has an MA in Arts Management. Previously, he was CEO of Live Music Now and The Royal Photographic Society, winning several awards. He has published influential research about the impact of arts participation on development, health and wellbeing - speaking at the Welsh Assembly, House of Lords and at conferences around the world. He was a saxophonist in the National Youth Jazz Orchestra (NYJO) and led a 60-piece big band at University College London for 8 years, whilst also volunteering as a music tutor at a South London housing estate. He has written music for live performance, film and television, including the string-quartet theme for BBC2's "Only Connect" (filmed in Cardiff); and his music photography has been published in national press and arts journals.

"Over the past 25 years, I have seen arts and creativity transform the lives of thousands of young people and their communities - building confidence, connection and joy. At National Youth Arts Wales, we are determined to provide high-quality cultural inspiration and support for young people throughout the whole country. We have an excellent staff and trustee team working hard to achieve this together."



Chris Hill: Life before, after and during the Nash

“We moved to Tenby when I was 6. I started piano lessons at 7, the violin at 8, swapping to the cello at 9 after being told that I couldn’t give up the violin unless I took up something else. “What else is there?” “Cello.” “OK I’ll do it”.

So, my music began in earnest with an inspiring teacher. The Rees sisters were the hub for music in Tenby and like so many things you don’t appreciate their value until well after they are gone. Saturdays were open house, in the morning everyone who could lift a string instrument would turn up and play March from Scipio (Edric Album). I remember one morning Miss Kathleen said to me, “You can beat time – stand up and beat 4” and that was the beginning of my conducting career aged 10. Then some of us would go out to lunch with 2 shillings in our pockets. In the afternoon we had individual lessons. There was high tea to which we all took a little something and, in the evening, we’d play chamber music. The astonishing thing is that this was all free. Not supported by the county or anything else, just the Rees sisters’ gift to us kids.

The next bit of luck was being asked to join the County Youth Orchestra. At this point it was a very high standard, but they were short of cellos, so I got the chance to go. Aged 11 I was definitely out of my depth socially amongst mostly 6th formers. However, they did look after me and include me in the evening trips to the local hostelry. Unfortunately, the music adviser, Gethin Jones (Hywel’s dad) was unwell for a while and the County Youth Orchestra didn’t meet for a while. When it restarted the 6th formers had all gone and, from being the newbie, I was now an old hand.

I nearly didn’t get into the Nash. Having auditioned I was turned down, but worse, a younger cellist a couple of grades behind had got in on the basis of being assessed for Chetham’s. You will know the now famous name, Grant Llewellyn. When I got called up on the morning that the course started, I was all for turning them down. Fortunately, my parents cajoled me and I began 6 years of wonderful music making and socialising. Once again luck was on my side. If you are reading this newsletter then you know all about the wonderful time we had on the music courses; inspirational teachers, long suffering house staff (sorry we made life so difficult) and that feeling of reaching the top of the world especially when you got to the last movement at the last concert. All this fully funded by the county – even the cruise!

I’m lucky that my engineering career allowed me to continue music. Everywhere I went I could find an orchestra to play in and usually there were ex Nash players in them. Now I’m retired I call myself a full-time amateur musician and enjoy playing, conducting, fixing and a bit of

arranging. The variety is endless: cello groups from duets to 60 cellos, orchestras, choirs and chamber groups. The delight is that many of them include ex Nash members (including a quartet made up of ex NYOW players).

Here's one for any archivists reading the newsletter: I play with Olwen Wonnacott (née Williams) who is now 94. She was a piano soloist with the Nash in the 1940s, the Grieg piano concerto I believe. We're currently working on the Chopin Sonata for a performance next year.

The music gift that started with the Rees sisters and continued in Pembrokeshire and Wales was much more than just music. It prepared me for life. “

Chris Hill: then and now!



1977



2022

From right to left: Michael Henderson, Hilary Oliver (Maggs), Chris Hill, Sian Rees (Maggs), Andrew Rees.

Instagram



Earlier this year, we were delighted to launch our very first Instagram page: [@nyowfriends](#)! By following this page, you will gain exclusive access to a collection of historic and current images that showcase the rich heritage of the orchestra and the ongoing activities undertaken by the Friends.

If you have any images from your time with the Nash that you would be happy for us to share on our Instagram page, please send them to Hannah Roberts at hannahrobwales@icloud.com. We would love to hear from you!

And don't forget the website: <https://fnyow.cymru/>