

GEOFFREY'S PLEASURABLE TRIP TO POLAND

Competitions can open up new worlds of exploration and discovery and it is always a joy for a composer to share his new ideas with fellow musicians. Recently I was fortunate enough to be one of six prize-winners selected by the first round jury of Paul Patterson, Piotr Moss and composer and musical director Maciej Zoltowski for the final of the Krzysztof Penderecki International Composer's Competition, a rare opportunity.

The task was to write a work for string orchestra and there were nearly fifty entries. I was flown out to Radom where the Radom Chamber Orchestra welcomed us to rehearse, discuss and perform our works.

My work was entitled *In Arboretum*, a fantasia suggested by the idea of a walk in a wood. This is the possible scenario. We enter a wood and following different paths we experience unexpected encounters, and proceeding deeper and darker, we have the traumatic realization of becoming lost. The second half is the search for the way out, a retracing of ones footsteps re-examining the terrain with new perspectives, a journey from darkness to light.

To hear ones work rehearsed and performed by a top professional chamber orchestra is reward enough, but there were three main prizes which went to the four young and very talented Polish composers; Bartosz Kowalski (first), Adam Porebski (second), Wojciech Blazejczyk and Ignacy Zalewski (joint third), names to look out for in the future. Mr Penderecki, as the chairman, must have had a very difficult job in having to judge the pieces in the final. The titles of the six prize-winning pieces were; *Prismatic shapes*, *Stretched for strings*, *Introjeksja*, *Poem*, *In Arboretum* and *In Memoriam*.

Interviews and recordings were made for Russian Radio for a future broadcast, and copies of the final well attended concert and photos are to be sent us. With a handshake we were all given flowers, a picture of Radom and a huge poster and we all had the chance of meeting and talking to the famous Mr Penderecki himself.

It was a splendid memorable occasion where friends were able to discuss and learn from each other and approach serious new music with a rare welcoming positive attitude and encouragement. Members of the very well dressed audience were treated not only to a feast of music but the most sumptuous reception after a concert I've ever attended.

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letters

NEW BACCALAUREATE

I am pleased to see that EPTA UK is promoting the cause of music in education in relation to the proposed baccalaureate in schools. I have been teaching both privately and in schools for forty years and have seen the role of music flourishing, and then declining, in its position on the curriculum. This may now be an opportunity to reclaim more time on the curriculum, but we must be sure that music teaching follows the best possible practise and maintains a high standard. Unfortunately although GCSE has many good aspects such as ensemble and composition work, there are some areas, especially in performance, where standards have not been maintained.

Fortunately ABRSM have maintained their standards whilst moving forward with the changes in education and society. In the jargon they have become 'user friendly' without loss of standards and introduced new, forward looking syllabuses. If we are to compete with other subjects for space, and indeed standing, the course offered must be vigorous and of a high standard. Dumbing down does not make music attractive.

Katharine Henry, Barnard Castle

GENDER

Michael Maxwell Steer's letter on gender (PP Autumn 2012) inspired me to consider gender issues in my own studio. I appreciate there is a major debate about gender stereo-typing, and a risk that teachers' reactions may prompt or stifle particular behaviours in girls and boys. Nevertheless, I thought I would share my experience.

Generally, I find girls of primary school age to be more amenable, more willing to please, more obedient, better focused, better at sitting still (also happy to draw and colour and write). Girls don't want to fail – they make an effort to achieve the tasks I set. Their playing is often tidy, sometimes a little dull, so I have to work hard to draw out characterful, dramatic playing.

I find primary age boys tend, on the whole, to be more adventurous, more creative, more imaginative – they think

outside the box. They tend to be less cooperative (especially ages three to eight), they are more easily distracted (they notice new objects in my studio, they fiddle with everything they can) and more energetic (they love kicking a football). They seem to care less about whether or not they succeed in a set task. I find them more difficult to teach in the early stages – very hard work! Their playing is often messy and unpredictable, but it is also full of character, excitement and interest.

Of course, there are excitable, uncooperative girls, and there are gentle, focused boys. I currently have in my studio eight boys of primary age, five of whom are very hard work to teach, and three are cooperative. I have eight primary age girls, three of whom are slightly energetic, the remaining five are fairly easy to teach. This is a typical balance in my studio year on year.

Those who teach children mostly over the age of about seven may not be so aware of these differences which, I think, are more evident in younger children.

Do others have similar experiences?

Jenny Macmillan,
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ABRSM ENTRY FORMS

I received a letter from the Associated Board to say that in future examinations entries have to all be made on line. However I do not have access to a computer. I am sure that I am not the only person with no access to a computer, therefore I would be grateful if you could look into the matter. I have written to the Associated Board to give my comments on the problem

Marie Westley, Dunstable.

EPTA UK contacted ABRSM about this matter and were informed that if applicants for examinations wish to enter candidates using hand-written forms, they should contact Portland Place directly on 0207636 5400 with a request for entry forms to be sent out via post. It is worth noting that ABRSM no longer automatically issues entry forms when posting out certificates and reports for candidates to teachers.