

## **SRP BRANCH REPORTS SUMMER 2013**

### **CHELTENHAM and GLOUCESTER**

Had we ever wondered what it might be like to conduct at a branch meeting? How many of us really understood everything that a conductor did? How well did we understand conducting directions? These were questions which we discussed one evening during a branch committee meeting in 2011.

On Saturday November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012, during a wonderful fun day put on for our branch and visitors by Moira Usher, we found the answers!

Moira called the day "Conducting for Beginners"; the plan was to have some people who would like to try their hand at conducting joined by players who would provide the orchestra. It was to be a day of much laughter, learning and friendship in which everyone was able to participate fully thanks to Moira's gentle way of involving all of us in the activities.

We began with a question and answer session on the role of conductor, and soon everyone was contributing!

In the first of the practical sessions we learned how to wave the baton in a time signature of 3/4. We thought that we could have been in a Harry Potter wand training scene, as 20 batons moved in time to Moira's beat! The clarity of baton movement improved rapidly as she helped us to move our baton wide and firmly from the shoulder. We learned to end each beat with a little flick described so well by Moira as a "click".

Later on we practised conducting in pairs, to recorded choral music with different time signatures. Moira came to each pair in turn to observe, help, and even in my case to move my arm for me! I needed to feel how to beat two in a bar, the time signature that I personally found hardest.

Tea and coffee breaks came at regular intervals, with delicious home-made cakes provided by committee members.

As the day progressed, so did we; Moira provided well-chosen music for budding conductors to conduct and the rest of us to play under their direction; after lunch there was even more opportunity for conducting, playing and feedback on what we were doing and learning.

All too soon it was four o'clock and time for a very enjoyable and successful day to come to an end.

Thank you very much Moira for all your hard work! We shall never take our conductors for granted again, and all that we have learned will enhance our enjoyment in playing for ever.

Thank you also to SRP for their subsidy of this event.

### **DORSET**

A special event early in the year was a Playing Day directed by Pam Smith, our 2013 Pastoral Visitor. On a sunshine and showers day in March we welcomed players from Somerset, Wessex and West Dorset branches, as well as from other groups. Pam had selected a programme spanning six centuries from Oswald von Wollenstein to Staeps by way of John Jenkins, Gershwin and others.

She guided us expertly through the music, explaining the special qualities of each piece and emphasising the need to pay careful attention to the silences. The notes on the page really came to life and proved that every composition, even if it appears straightforward, can be a work of depth and beauty when properly understood. Strengthened by this knowledge, we confidently played the five-bar phrases in von Wollenstein's *Ave Mater, O Maria* and negotiated the stylistic features of

Staeps' *Unicorn's Grace*, a work previously unfamiliar to many of us.

Thank you, Pam. And thank you SRP for the special Playing Day Award in recognition of the 75th Anniversary.

Over the course of the last few months we have been delighted that new players have joined us. Some have sought us out, while regular players have introduced others. We continue, month by month, to enjoy music-making with our visiting conductors. Some have been visiting us for many years and are always pleased to spend an afternoon in Blandford.

In a departure from our usual format, we are planning a DIY afternoon in December. Any player can have a go at conducting in a relaxed pre-Christmas atmosphere, no experience necessary. Who knows? Hidden talents may be realised!

If you are visiting Dorset, do contact us and join in an afternoon's playing. We meet at the URC Hall in Blandford Forum on the second Saturday of each month, except August.

## **EDINBURGH**

We celebrated the 75th Anniversary of the SRP in style, putting our £150 award towards a workshop with Pamela Thorby. This was a whole-day event in Edinburgh on 16<sup>th</sup> February, open to all interested recorder players of any age and level, as well as SRP members.

Players were invited to participate in two ways: chiefly as an audience member but with an opportunity to play, improvise, and practise technique; or as a performer playing a short piece, no longer than 6 minutes – for a mini-master class of about 20 minutes.

The response was instant and huge! We put together a programme of 16 solo, duet, trio and quartet performances, including several young players from local schools, and had a hall full of audience participants as well as performers.

The success of the day depended to a great extent on Pamela's energy, generosity and skill as a teacher. It was quite uncanny how she assessed almost instantly the personality and needs of each new performer or group, at whatever level, and focussed in on particular aspects of their playing and performance that they probably weren't expecting but were able to absorb. Technique, interpretation, developing a palette of options for ornamentation, stage presence, engaging with an audience, learning how to start and end in quartet playing, good sites for music downloads: we were all entranced and learnt a great deal.

Another pleasure was the variety of music performed: some pieces were new to most people, for instance *Marokawia's Lament* from *Moon Dances* by Walter May, or *A Summer Day* by Christopher Ball, or Béla Bartók's *Bauernlieder und Tänze* arranged by Hans Staeps.

Pamela made sure that the audience was engaged: playing the ground for some pieces, and practising various points of technique as they came up. We ended the day with everyone in the hall learning and playing songs and rounds.

The workshop was an ambitious undertaking but thanks to Pamela's skill and stamina and the work our players had put into their performances, it proved to be a memorable and satisfying way to spend our award.

## ESSEX

In November we were delighted to welcome back Ian Wilson for another playing day. Ian guided us through a wide variety of music with his gentle charm, adding to last year's concepts of "hot" and "cold" air, a new one - "sticky fingers" – two words encapsulating perfectly the idea of rolling the fingers smoothly from one note to the next. At Marion Panzetta's request the day ended with Ian's delightful arrangement of Scottish airs.

February brought Sheila Richards for a Pastoral Visit, with an enjoyable selection of music ranging from Deering, Handel and Elgar to Brahms – a Hungarian dance in which the constant off-beat quavers tested the powers of concentration of those playing the allegedly easier inner parts – and Percy Fletcher, a prolific composer whose life spanned the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but who is now largely forgotten. His *Fifinetttte* was arranged from a piano arrangement by Sheila.

We are looking forward to our annual visit to Ingatestone Hall on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> July, and to a playing day with Caroline Radcliffe on 2<sup>nd</sup> November.

## KENT

We are a very welcoming group and our recent music-making has been immensely enjoyable. Last year we concentrated on early music including Purcell's *Fantasia in G minor* and other music by Byrd and Gabrieli. This music was tailored to fit in with the concerts we participated in: one concert was in Broadstairs on a beautiful sunny day where we joined *Coastal Voices* and *Duo Toccante* with recorder players Marion Scott and Jo Hardwick.

In April 2012 we were privileged to be invited to join a concert in Thurnham which despite the horror movie weather of whistling wind and pouring rain was a great success. We were allowed the chance to perform not only as an SRP group but also to sing with the choir and baroque orchestra in performing Vivaldi's *Gloria in D*, conducted by Marion.

In December we were invited to play for the Mayor of Maidstone's Christmas Party. This proved to be an interesting experience as the venue was the Museum cafeteria, where we had to compete with two very noisy fridges as well as the partygoers talking whilst we played! In spite of this, it was a fun Christmassy event.

In March this year we braved the extreme cold to give two concerts, with music including a lively modern arrangement by Benjamin Thorn of the medieval *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, Vivaldi's *Concerto in A minor* and Helen Hooker's eight-part arrangement of Lotti's beautiful *Crucifixus*. We marked the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of John Dowland with guest soprano Jane Jones, accompanied on lute by Rick Jones, followed by *Lachrymae Amantis Pavan* from the recorders. In a more light-hearted mood we played *Teddy Bears' Picnic*, *Singing in the Rain* and the well-known Hungarian gypsy dance *Csardas*.

We meet just once or twice in the summer term and then weekly from September. Next year promises to be equally exciting for music-making, extending and improving our technique as players and as a group. We are an enthusiastic group, directed by Marion Scott, and we always welcome new players.

## MACCLESFIELD – new branch

A new group met in Macclesfield in February 2013 with a “Taster” session to which eighteen players came. We began our meeting very simply with a rendition of *Nearer my God to Thee* appropriately for our first meeting in Prestbury Methodist Church! During the course of the afternoon we played music ranging from Henry VIII to Purcell, Fauré and Lehár.

The meeting was very well supported from both local players and those belonging to other branches, but our challenge now is to recruit more regular players in order to meet our aim of becoming a thriving branch of the Society here in East Cheshire.

We shall continue our Saturday afternoon meetings on a monthly basis under the leadership of our Musical Director Jane Duff, so do come along to join or visit us, we look forward to meeting and playing with you. Dates and times are on the SRP website.

## NORFOLK



Our Day of Playing in October last year (seems ages go) with Pam Smith conducting was a most successful and enjoyable occasion. Pam drove up to Norwich via Ely and a visit to the cathedral, the great “Ship of the Fens”, with her car boot full of lovely things to play.

Notable in a very busy day of playing: Josquin des Prés motet, *Fili mi* “My son Absalon, my son” - this one can produce the odd tear. This we followed with two fantasias, Martin Peerson No.1, *Aquaintance* and Purcell’s *Fantasia No.10* from 1680.

After lunch we went into the wonderfully atmospheric world of Arvo Pärt’s *Da Pacem Domine* (2004) based on a 9<sup>th</sup> century antiphon. We finished the day on a high with Agostino Soderino’s *Canzona, L’Angelina* in eight parts.

Pam enjoyed her fleeting visit to East Anglia and we look forward to another visit before too long.

At our AGM in November, lifetime member Ron Skins officially announced his intention to retire in October 2013, after 50 years of service as founder and Musical Director of Norfolk branch. Ron's leadership and conducting skills will be hard to replace. We shall mark his retirement with a special Day of Playing, revisiting, perhaps, one or two pieces played at the first meeting in 1963.

Photo: Pam Smith and Charles Levien

### **NUNEATON**

Alan Perkins will be our guest conductor on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September. We always look forward to Alan's annual visit, and anticipate another amusing and informative afternoon.