Playing Day November 19th 2022

And the day dawned frosty with our second playing day of the year, courtesy of the SRP‘s generosity and our visiting conductor, Michael Graham.

Michael arrived the previous day to give himself time to discover the delights of Taunton, which was fortunate as a train strike was planned for the Saturday of our meeting.

We began proceedings by having a warm up of both body and lungs, Michael giving us tips on how to prevent RSI from too much recorder playing, and emphasising the need to breath from the diaphragm!

We then began playing by looking at an Ann Marshall arrangement of Dowland’s Flow My Tears, a very beautiful and moving piece. This needed all of our breath control to help with the longer notes, and I think Michael was happy with our attempts.

We then moved into the realm of Jazz rhythms with Ann Marshall’s Autumn Suite, a work of 4 contrasting movements and again Michael attempting to get the best effect from us, guiding us on the good ways to improve our playing.

After a short comfort break, we completed playing the piece by Ann Marshall, followed by a work written by Nathaniel Gow - the Nathaniel Gow Suite. This incorporates many folk and jazz songs and was collected by Nathaniel Gow and his father. Again, many rhythms to sort out, but under Michael’s guidance we achieved a passable play through.

Lunch break –kept short as we had so much music to play. We then had a fun but enjoyable ‘after lunch’ suite, Marg Hall’s - Swing Easy. Once again Michael gave us reminders on looking at the key signature and hints on how to play the rhythms. This was followed by another work by an Edinburgh resident - James Carey and his Mock Baroque. Although this suite is well known to some of us, Michael put a different angle on the music and I’m sure that we all learnt something new in playing the pieces.

Tea break brought on lovely cakes plus the raffle; lots of us won prizes, (all money to Branch Funds). After tea, came a chance to play some of Michael’s compositions - firstly 4 Folk Melodies from the North of England, which Michael arranged for various visits to SRP branches in the North and has now compiled into a set. Here we not only learnt the notes, but also foot stamping and recorder hitting! Great fun to play, and good representations of the North!

Finally, the icing on the cake – Michael composed a piece especially for our occasion -The Cuckoo, which cleverly bought things full circle, as the piece incorporates some Somerset folk tunes. He donated a copy to the branch but I look forward to the compilation of South Western tunes, written for SRP groups in other parts of the South West.

A really lovely day, which as Neil said in his summing up, had something for everyone, whatever their ability. We also enjoyed many anecdotes from Michael, mostly about his life as a conductor, and were fortunate to play some exceptionally lovely music.

So many thanks to Michael for making the long (and delayed due to Covid) trip from Edinburgh, but also thanks to everyone who made the day a success – Judy, Neil, Mary and Miriam in the all-important kitchen area plus all those who helped with the setting up, putting away, advertising, finances, transport etc.

Somerset is such a friendly and helpful branch; so long may we continue to host inspiring days such as this.