**Saturday 21st October 2023**

**Playing Day with Sarah Whomersley**

I arrived at the hall with our conductor for the day – the highly recommended Sarah Whomersley, to find a lot of participants already in their places, anticipating a great day of music.

Coffee before the start was provided by Vivienne and Judy; and many thanks to all those who set the hall up ready for the day.

We began playing with a quiet piece – **Grieg’s Varen (Last Spring)** – originally written for strings, but arranged by Norman Luff for recorders. It was a beautiful start which included all instruments from Sopranino to Contra Bass; Sarah said she wanted to test the playing strength of the group in order to plan the rest of her programme.

A livelier – and technically more challenging piece followed - **Telemann Sonata in D major (Arr. Sarah Whomersley)**. Lots of interesting rhythms, a very ‘loud and busy’ piece – especially compared with the opening number – here the descants were imitating trumpets. At the end of the piece Sarah asked those who could to stand up and play and the sound improved massively.

This was followed by another more gentle number – again, Sarah’s own arrangement of **Horner’s Someone Out There from American Tail**. This was a very beautiful and evocative piece, which we all enjoyed learning.

Just before the lunch break, Sarah introduced us to the French style of Saraband playing and inègal quavers, with 2 short but straightforward pieces, **Sarabande and Bouree by Delande**. Although the music looked simple on the page, there was plenty to work on and build up our appetites for lunch.

After lunch we used our French style playing in a longer work by Lully, the infamous French Baroque composer, who was said to have changed the way a group is conducted. The piece was **Passacailo,** and contained many opportunities to put our French style playing to good use. We worked hardy at this piece and gave a creditable rendition at the end, but it would definitely be worth another look in the future. At the finale of this piece Sarah persuaded us all to stand in a circle around her – a great effect.

Lightening the mood we then played **John Bratton’s Teddy Bear’s Picnic**, something which many of us have played before, and most of the players knew. The biggest issue was probably the geography of the piece – always tricky!

This led us nicely into the tea break, served by more experts, Gill and Sue, along with delicious cake and a small raffle in aid of branch funds.

For the final new piece, Sarah split us into 2 choirs, to play **Gabrieli’s Noni Toni à 8**. A wonderful piece, but perhaps would have been better tackled earlier in the day as there were some interesting exchanges between the 2 choirs, some rhythmic and tempo issues and some issues regarding the copy we were using. Mostly were resolved to a satisfactory standard and would definitely be worth another look at some time.

We ended the afternoon with a revisit to the Grieg and the Horner –which provided a lovely calm way of closing a lovely day of playing. By the end of we knew that this had mostly been achieved.

Thank you so much to Sarah for making the journey from Cornwall, and giving the branch such a memorable day. Special thanks too to those visitors who joined us for the day and I hope they will come again in the future. Special thanks to all of those people who helped with the smooth running of the day, providing refreshments and setting out and putting away furniture.