

NORFOLK & NORWICH MUSIC CLUB HISTORY 1951-2017

Written in April 2018 by Roger Rowe

Roger Rowe succeeded Miriam Cannell as Hon Secretary and Programme Organiser from the beginning of the 1996/1997 season. Awarded MBE in 2008 for voluntary service to Music he retired after 22 years service at the age of 80 in 2017.

With its rich cultural scene today, life in Norwich during the years following the end of the 1939-45 war may be hard to imagine. The Theatre Royal was operational but offered a very basic fare, the Norfolk & Norwich Triennial Festival was, as the name implies, a periodic few days in 1947, '51 & '55 of concentrated orchestral, choral & celebrity concerts. There were a variety of small amateur groups but the mainstay of the classical music scene was the Norwich Philharmonic Society, a largely amateur body, offering a regular series of orchestral and choral concerts with professional soloists and the occasional celebrity recital. There were virtually no professional chamber music recitals.

The Assembly House, which had been the home of the girl's high school in the inter-war years and a miscellany of uses during the war, had just been renovated by the Sexton family and presented to the city for public use. The Music Room was therefore available as the ideal venue for chamber music.

It was against this background that, on the initiative of the Norwich Philharmonic Society, a meeting of local music representatives was called with a view to creating an independent body that might co-ordinate musical activities. On 31st March 1951 the Norfolk & Norwich Music Club was formed with "the objects of a) to give members the opportunity for meeting under pleasant social conditions for the sharing of their musical interests b) to augment these interests by planning discussions, lectures etc., and c) to arrange lecture recitals and recitals by visiting artists" (sic).

The driving force was Mr W J Dearnaley, Head of Town Close School, who was elected Chairman and he was determined from then that music making would be at the highest level. He invited Benjamin Britten to become President. The London Harpsichord Ensemble were engaged for the inaugural concert in the Music Room on 26th May 1951 and the first season included recitals by Dennis Matthews, the Amadeus Quartet, Gerald Moore as well as Benjamin Britten & Peter Pears.

The programme for the first year had been planned by committee (under the strong guidance of Mr Dearnaley) but in March 1952 Miriam Cannell was appointed Hon. Secretary and assumed responsibility for programme planning. Over the course of the next few years the illustrious body of national and international musicians who came to the Assembly House included Dennis Brain, Flora Nielsen, Julian Bream, Paul Tortelier, Osian Ellis, William Pleeth, Leon Goosens, Nina Milkina, Gervese de Peyer as well as further recitals from Pears & Britten and the Amadeus Quartet. The many eminent international string quartets included the legendary Tátrai & Bartók from Hungary and the Janáček from Czechoslovakia.

Miriam was also keen to include young artists at the start of their careers and these included John Ogden & Stephen Bishop (now Kovasevich) Franz Brüggén as well as the Lindsay, Chillingarian & Takács quartets. Through her hospitality and encouragement many of them returned several times and she built up a special rapport with the Nash Ensemble who came to Norwich no less than eight times, including a special concert which the club gave on her retirement in June 1996 after more than 40 years honorary service organising over 350 concerts. Roger Rowe succeeded Miriam Cannell as Hon Secretary and Programme Organiser from the beginning of the 1996/1997 season. Awarded MBE in 2008 for voluntary service to Music he retired after 22 years service at the age of 80 in 2017.

The majority of the concerts had been held in the Music Room of the Assembly House with occasional excursions to Blackfriars Hall. In April 1995 fire destroyed a large part of the Assembly House including the Music Room and during the rebuilding period the club decamped, principally to the United Reformed Church Princes Street but other venues included the Walter Roy Theatre, St Giles' Street Masonic Lodge & Blackfriars Hall. The club returned to the Assembly House for the last concert of the season in June 1997 but in the aftermath of the fire, limitations on seating capacity in the Music Room and car park restrictions made concert making there increasingly difficult. In 1997

there was a proposal to move to the 320 seat modern John Innes Centre Conference Centre. After a successful trial concert sponsored by the Property Partnership in May 1998 the decision was taken to move there permanently from April 1999.

Although there was initially some resistance to the move away from the city centre, the acoustics, seat comfort and sight lines, improved bar and circulation area as well as improved artists back stage facilities, and of course free parking, won the day. The adjoining seminar rooms meant that it was possible to organise pre-concert talks and interviews with musicians and these become a popular feature in subsequent seasons. The number of concerts per season was expanded from around ten to fifteen.

A trial chamber music weekend was pioneered in January 2000, these weekends have become a popular date in the calendar and over the years eminent musicians have been invited to devise the event. Hosts have included Pascal Rogé, Steven Isserlis, Julius Drake, Natalie Clein, François-Frédéric Guy, Borodin Quartet & Michael Collins.

In addition extra concert series were planned to feature particular themes - in March 2004 the Borodin Quartet performed the complete cycle of Beethoven Quartets in six concerts over eight days. They returned in 2006 to celebrate the Shostakovich Centenary with a complete cycle of his fifteen quartets in five concerts over nine days. In April 2010 the Guarneri Trio from Prague performed Beethoven's complete works for piano trio. In the spring of 2011, the distinguished French pianist François-Frédéric Guy presented the complete cycle of Beethoven sonatas in ten recitals, some held at the Assembly House and most at the John Innes Centre.

The club returned to the Assembly House for a 60th anniversary concert on 26th June 2011 when the Finzi & Idomeneo Quartets performed the Mendelssohn Octet. In October 2011 the Takács Quartet performed all six Bartók Quartets over a weekend. To celebrate the centenary of the club's first president, Benjamin Britten, in November 2013, four concerts featured almost all of his chamber music, including the song cycles, two of them recreating the programmes which Britten and Pears had given to the club in the 1950's.

In the course of two seasons in 2012-2014, the Elias Quartet presented their series of all the Beethoven Quartets. In keeping with the times the club became known as Norfolk and Norwich Chamber Music with the logo NNCM. In 2014/2015 Alina Ibragimova & Cedric Tiberghien presented the complete Mozart violin Sonatas in five recitals.

The Borodin Quartet, with Michael Collins, returned to the John Innes Centre for Roger Rowe's 80th birthday concert on 6th June 2017. On his retirement Roger Rowe was elected honorary President. Misha Donat became Artistic Director from the commencement of the 2017/2018 season.

NOTE; Some information for this history of the club has been taken from articles in the programme for the Thirtieth Anniversary concert on 4th April 1981 (Miriam Cannell Reminiscing & Kurt Schwarz Changes) and from an Eastern Daily Press Celebrity Profile of Miriam Cannell in 1992.

ADDITIONAL NOTES AND INFORMATION

Attached files;

Word Format; Complete schedule of concerts from May 1951 – June 2017

Excel Format; Complete schedule of Ensembles & Artists with dates 1951 – June 2017

CHARITY COMMISSION

Shortly after its formation in 1951 the Club was registered in the name of Norfolk & Norwich Music Club Registered Charity No 278446

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF MUSIC SOCIETIES/MAKING MUSIC & PRS

The Club joined the NFMS (renamed Making Music in 2000) shortly after it was formed. In the early days the Society was helpful in its distribution of Arts Council Funds, and Awards for Young Concert Artists, as well as agreements with the Performing Rights Society (PRS) and its financial awards (The Club won such an award in 1990) and group insurance. In the early days it was also a valuable source of financial support for chamber groups through Eastern Circuit which it encouraged and partly funded. When the name changed to Making Music in 2000 the range of musical groups widened and now focuses principally on amateur choirs, orchestras (including steel bands, samba groups) and festivals and has become less valuable and helpful to classical chamber music societies.

Further help through subsidized fees for selected young artists has also been provided by The Countess of Munster Trust, The Kirkman Concert Society, Young Concert Artists Trust and generous private donations.

EDUCATION & OUTREACH WORK

The club's first involvement in any form of outreach work was in 1999 when, at the request of the Arts Officer of the N&N Hospital, it arranged and funded the Almira Quartet to give two informal recitals in a number of the hospital wards. This was followed by a similar visit to Doughty's Hospital.

In 1999 the National Federation of Music Societies had introduced a number of initiatives - The Music Experience & New Horizons - to encourage members to widen interest in classical chamber music and singing. The first project involved I Fagiolini who visited local schools with singing and performance workshops and this was followed by a concert in the Assembly House on 16 November 1999 to which selected pupils were invited.

In 2000, at the suggestion of the Head of West Earlham Primary School, members of the visiting Mobius Ensemble gave a day of workshops (11/2/00) to the pupils financed by the club.

In 2001 the Club arranged for London based Chroma Ensemble to visit five local primary schools to introduce themselves, their instruments and their music, followed by a special concert at the John Innes Centre to give children the experience of a live concert away from the school. This pattern was approved by both the school themselves and the County Music department. The project with Chroma has been repeated each of the last 17 years (2001-2018).

The Borodin's Beethoven & Shostakovich cycles in 2004 & 2006 were joint projects with UEA Music Department and some of the students, under the guidance of Dr Sharon Choa prepared theses on the projects.

Visiting musicians have been encouraged to stay on to perform in schools and these have included Natalie Clein (14/2/09), Elias Quartet (3/12/12), O Duo Percussion (26/10/14), (Chetham's Quartet 2/2/15) Moriarty Wind Ensemble (6/11/16), & Oliver Wass (20/3/17)

In recent years the club has given major financial support to Sistema Norwich and in March 2014 arranged and sponsored a Tasmin Little fund-raising concert at the John Innes Centre. Earlier in that day Tasmin Little had worked with the young musicians who are part of the Sistema project. This work has been funded by generous donations from various local and national charities and from private donations.

For ongoing work please see the Education tab.

NEW COMMISSIONS

To celebrate its Silver Jubilee in 1976, the club commissioned the Suffolk based composer William Alwyn to write a String Quartet. Alwyn's String Quartet No 2 titled Spring Waters was performed by the Gabrieli Quartet and broadcast by the BBC at a concert in Blackfriars Hall on 29th May 1976. It was subsequently recorded (1980) by the Quartet of London (Chandos) and the Maggini Quartet (Naxos).

In 1981 for the 30th Anniversary Concert the club commissioned Anthony Payne to write a song cycle for his wife, the soprano Jane Manning, who was born in Norwich. Evening Land – a cycle of poems from Par Lagerkvist's Aftonland, was given its premiere, by Jane Manning & John McCabe at the Thirtieth Anniversary Concert on 4th April 1981.

Since 1997 there has been a policy to commission or co-commission works, preferably from composers with local connections. David Bedford, who had been composer-in-residence at the 1996 & 1997 N&N Festivals, was commissioned to write a string quartet and his Quartet No 2 received its first performance at the John Innes Centre by the Schidlof Quartet on 30th May 1997. It was repeated at the 1998 N&N Festival when it was recorded.

The Mandelring Quartet from Germany, gave the premiere of David Matthew's 8th String Quartet on 29th November 1998.

In 2000 the Norfolk composer Douglas Weiland was appointed composer-in-residence and commissioned to write a variety of compositions over an 8 year period. This resulted in a Piano Quartet (Pro Arte Quartet – 25/3/2000), the Piano Trio Op 32 (Altenberg Trio – 9/4/05), the Third Cello Suite (Steven Isserlis – 12 & 13/11/05), the Clarinet Quintet (Marriner/St Martin's Ensemble – 25/3/06) and the Third String Quartet (Hamer Quartet – 29/3/08).

In 2000 the N & N Festival composer-in-residence Howard Skempton was commissioned to write a short piano piece Whispers for Viv McLean, winner for the Barcelona Piano competition.

Anna Meredith, the first woman composer to be commissioned by the club, composed a Sextet Railgun which the Chroma Ensemble performed on 24th September 2011.

Gordon Crosse came to prominence as a composer at Aldeburgh in the 1960's, so he was a natural choice to write something to celebrate the Benjamin Britten Centenary. The first, a string quartet intended to be a companion piece to Britten's Divertimento, was titled Blyth Postcards and was given its first performance by the Carducci Quartet on 23rd November 2013, within a few days of Britten's 100th birthday. The second piece, Little Bu for solo cello was written especially for David Cohen who performed it on 27th January 2017.

The Carducci Quartet gave the first performance of the Kemal Yusef's String Quartet OYUN, another commission, on 18th February 2017.

Schedule of Commissions

29/5/76 (Silver Jubilee)	William Alwyn; String Quartet No 2 Spring Waters Gabrieli Quartet
4/4/81 (30th Anniversary)	Anthony Payne; Evening Land – song cycle Jane Manning (soprano) & John McCabe (piano)
30/5/98	David Bedford; String Quartet No 2 Schidlof Quartet
29/11/98	David Matthews; Quartet No 8 Op 75

Mandelring Quartet

25/3/00	Douglas Weiland; Piano Quartet Homage to Philip Kendall Pro Arte Piano Quintet
10/12/00	Howard Skempton; Whispers for piano Viv McLean
9/4/05	Douglas Weiland; Piano Trio No 2 Op 32 Altenberg Trio
12/11/05	Douglas Weiland; Third Cello Suite; Isserlis Mikro-suite Steven Isserlis
25/3/06	Douglas Weiland; Clarinet Quintet Op 33 Academy of St Martin's Ensemble/Andrew Marriner
29/3/08	Douglas Weiland; Third String Quartet Op 39 Hamer Quartet
24/9/11	Anna Meredith; Railgun for Piano Sextet Chroma Ensemble
23/11/13	Gordon Crosse; Fourth String Quartet Blyth Postcards Carducci Quartet
17/1/16	Gordon Crosse; Sonata for Solo Cello Little Bu David Cohen
18/2/17	Kemal Yusuf; String Quartet OYUN Carducci Quartet

THE BBC

BBC Third Programme/Radio 3 has broadcast live or recorded a number of concerts over the years, notably:-

29/5/76	25th Anniversary Concert - Gabrieli Quartet
24/1/93	Piers Adams/Howard Beach.
20/1/05	Discovering Music, Shostakovich Quartet No 8/ Royal SQ
7/9/07	Discovering Music, Trout Quintet/ Stephen Johnson/Gould Trio and others
2009/2010	season (3 concerts)
2010/11	season (4 concerts)
2/12/2012	Elias Quartet
8/10/2012	Evgenia Rubinova - live recital introduced by Martin Handley

A FEW STATISTICS

From formation in 1951 to June 2017 the club has promoted 631 chamber music concerts, 260 of these have been at the John Innes Centre.

Over 1000 musicians have participated in the concerts over 66 years including nearly 100 String Quartets.

In the early days the Amadeus Quartet came on 3 occasions and Britten & Pears gave 4 recitals together. Amongst distinguished visitors in the early years Osian Ellis, Gerald Moore, William Pleeth & Julian Bream came on several occasions. The famous Janáček and Bartók Quartets with their original members visited the club in the 1950's.

The Takács Quartet in their original formation first came in 1987 and have been regular visitors over the years with a total of 8 concerts including a Bartók cycle.

The Borodin Quartet holds the record for the greatest number of concerts over the period to June 2017 - and two of it's members who took part in all their visits, Ruben Aharonian (violin) & Igor Nadin (viola), hold the record for individual musicians .

The following PAPER ARCHIVES were lodged in April 2018 with the Norfolk Record Office, The Archive Centre, Norwich NR1 2DQ under the accession number ACC2018/10. They may be consulted free at the NRO, contact 01603 222599 www.archives.norfolk.gov.uk

5 Minute Books 1951-1961 1962-1969 1970-1976 1976-1982 1983-1987
4 Ledgers 1951-1962 1962-1978 1978-1888 1988-1993
Miscellaneous note books
Visitors' Books 1951-2003 2003-2015
Miscellaneous Mementos including a letter from Benjamin Britten.
Miscellaneous correspondence 60's & 70's
Package of poster samples/Club Constitution & History

Programmes for Seasons

1951/52 - 1959/60

1960/61 – 1968/69

1969/70 – 1979/80

1980/81 – 1989/90

1990/91 – 1999/00

2000/01 – 2004/05

Beethoven Cycle 2004

2005/6 – 2008/9

Shostakovich Cycle 2006

2009/10 – 2011/12

2012/13 – 2014/15

2015/16 – 2016/17

Commissions 1 & 2

Schools

Minutes 2003-September 2012