

# Solway Sinfonia

Newsletter October 2016

## *A Note from our Director*



We first felt confident enough to invite a virtuoso soloist to play a concerto with us in 2003, when Murray McLachlan memorably played the Mozart D minor and Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue'. The following year the Taiwanese violinist Leland Chen played Beethoven, and we have since accompanied him in the the Brahms Double Concerto (with Sally Pendlebury) in 2006, the Glazunov in 2009 and the Brahms in 2012. Murray and Leland have become personal friends, I'm proud to say, and each has been kind enough to suggest that he thoroughly enjoys playing with us! Rehearsing with performers of such calibre is both an intense musical challenge and a stimulating experience for all of us. The good news then, is that on 27th November Leland Chen will join us at the Easterbrook Hall to perform the Sibelius Violin Concerto (hence this special Violin Edition of our Newsletter).

It's hard to believe, but next year the Solway Sinfonia celebrates the 20th year of its inception – and do we plan to celebrate? We certainly do! Our Spring Gala Concert, at the Easterbrook Hall on 27th March, will be a Beethoven extravaganza: a free gift to us from Murray McLachlan and his three virtuoso children in aid of 'Music in Hospitals'. On 18th June the Sinfonietta will give an informal Barn Concert: 'Strawberries, Fizz, and Midsummer Music' at the Caerlaverock Nature Reserve – where in a sense our history began in 1997, with the performance of leader Sarah Berker's 'Caerlaverock Suite'.

On Sunday 17th September promising young musicians from the region are to be invited to join the orchestra for rehearsal, followed by an informal concert. We are committed to the encouragement of young talent whenever we are able.

Our Autumn Gala Concert, on 26th November at the Easterbrook Hall, will feature two recent and highly popular soloists: Freya Jacklin, mezzo soprano, in Elgar's 'Sea Pictures', and Kirsten Jenson, cellist, in Tchaikovsky's 'Rococo Variations'. It will be a great feast of musical joy for us – and, we hope, for our life-enhancing Sponsors and Patrons and for our audiences.



*Leland Chen's Understudy: new rising star, Geoff Keating, bowing his Sibelius.*



### *Leland Chen's Violin*

It is the ambition of every violinist to own an instrument that helps to convey fully their musical objectives, both in recital and larger-scale works with orchestra. Leland Chen is no exception and during his career he has been privileged to play on many fine instruments including two Stradivari and one Guarneri.

For the past sixteen years he has played on a Guarnerius copy made by Glen Collins of Newark, arguably the leading British violin-maker working today.

Leland has recently taken delivery of a new Collins violin, a copy of the Guarneri 'Lord Wilton', and he believes that this new instrument has brought him nearer to his aim of owning a violin that suits his personal musical requirements.

'I have a violin specially commissioned from Glen Collins. It is far superior to the two Stradivari and a Guarneri del Gesu violins I played on during the mid eighties and is also an incredible leap from my previous Glen Collins which I had used for over twelve years in preference to the Strads. This is the violin I have been looking for and those who have heard it have been astounded by its incredible tonal qualities.'

### *Message from the Editor*

Welcome to our Special Violin Edition of the Solway Sinfonia Newsletter, as we look forward to Leland Chen playing the Sibelius Violin Concerto with us this Autumn. Our contributors take up the theme ...



# *A Little History of the Violin: Angela Lawrence*

In a painting by Ferrari, *Madonna of the Orange Tree* (1530) the first instrument very like a violin is seen, played by a cherub with a bow. Cherubs can still be seen playing violins to this very day, in the *Solway Sinfonia*. These earliest violins (not related to the viol family, as often assumed) originated from northern Italy where renowned stringed instrument craftsmen worked (eg. in Cremona). The first written use of the word *violino* occurs in 1538. Despite this, the violin is often said to have been born in the 1550s.

The oldest surviving violins are the "Charles IX" by Andrea Amati, Cremona, 1564, and an Amati labelled 1558. One of the most famous, in pristine condition, is the "Messiah Stradivarius" 1716, by Antonio Stradivari. Generally, instruments of about 300 years of age, especially by Stradivari, Guarneri del Gesù, Amati, and Jacob Stainer, are most sought after.

The violin quickly became popular at fêtes, taverns, domestically, and later at court. Its capacity for rhythmic articulation and penetrating tone was ideal for dance music (replacing the rebec). Despite its more serious use for religious purposes as well, violin playing was not immediately considered a genteel pursuit - violinists were considered to be a species of servant. Thankfully, these days we are better respected!

Between 1650 and 1750 musical innovations were abundant. For example, rather than instruments "one to a line", violins began to be used "many to a line". Lully began supplementing these string bands with brass and wind, and thus the orchestra emerged, along with the concerto and, later, the symphony. The "equal temperament" tuning system allowed many instruments to play together, in all keys. Technical and creative developments from the 16th to 19th centuries drove (and were driven by) physical changes to the violin and bow which increased capability, response and volume, as larger orchestras became popular. For example, the fingerboard

was tilted more, and slightly lengthened, enabling higher notes to be played. Many old instruments were modified, including lengthening the neck, in response to the raising of pitch in the 19th century, whilst the bass bar of nearly all old instruments was made heavier to allow greater string tension. Spohr invented the chinrest, increasing comfort of players scaling new giddy heights. Progress through the violin's history required the bow to

be remodelled at each stage, but this huge topic must wait for another day.

In the late 19th century, Stroh invented a violin using mechanical amplification. It had a horn that points towards the audience, and a smaller horn pointed at the player's ear, for audibility on a loud stage: with boisterous modern brass and wind a few feet away this invention might still be welcome today! In the 20th century, the electrically amplified violin usurped the Stroh. These can have up to seven strings: a 5 string violin combines the range of a violin and viola, but making neither acoustic instrument - nor cherub - redundant, one hopes.



*Ferrari, Madonna of the Orange Tree (1530) - detail above with full painting below left.*

## *Recipe for a Violin*

First find a spruce tree (for the top and sides)  
It must be tall and graceful, full of birdsong.  
Second find a maple tree (for the back)  
It must be sweet and loved by bees.  
Third find an ebony tree (for fingerboard and pegs)  
It must be strong and black.

Now to fashion, bend, shape and cut  
All this with love and care.  
Now to dress with strings - gut for warmth, steel for  
brightness, nylon for beauty.

Then there needs a bow !  
This requires special skill to fashion and bend.  
Pernambuco or brazilwood is best.  
And as a finale  
The patient laying to and fro  
of hair from a horse's tail !

NOW

Put all in the hands of a skilled player  
And sit back to be enchanted by magical sounds.

*Pauline Roe*



## Gutsy Stuff: David Sumner

*The rough and woeful music that we have,  
Cause it to sound, beseech you.  
The viol once more.....*

Shakespeare: *Pericles*, Act 3, Scene 1

There are several references in Shakespeare's plays to viols but the violin doesn't get a mention, possibly because it still wasn't very common in Shakespeare's time. However, John Dilworth, in a fascinating article in *The Strad* ([www.thestrad.com/cpt-latests/how-well-did-shakespeare-know-the-violin/](http://www.thestrad.com/cpt-latests/how-well-did-shakespeare-know-the-violin/)) has said that Shakespeare 'lived at a turning point in the [violin's] popularity. Immediately after him, specific references to the instrument begin to appear.'

Like everything else about Shakespeare, what he really thought about the music of stringed instruments is almost certainly unknowable. But consider the question posed by Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*:

*Is it not strange that sheeps' guts should hale souls out of men's bodies?*

In Shakespeare's time, all stringed instruments would have used catgut; and today, although steel or synthetic materials are commonly used on modern instruments, gut is still much the preferred choice for music of the Baroque period and earlier. The increased use of gut has been driven largely by the continuing quest for authenticity. But what difference does it make to the listener? I have a friend who describes the sound of a period instrument string quartet as 'sour'. But speaking personally, I love to hear (for example) the Bach partitas for solo violin, or Hadyn string quartets, played on

period instruments with gut strings – to me the sound seems clearer, lighter and cleaner, if that makes sense.

But there is a moral dimension to this. Gut strings are made, as Benedick says, from the intestines of sheep. Are the sheep killed specifically for this purpose? If so, is it possible to be a vegetarian or vegan Baroque violinist? I would love to hear the views of string players about this.

Moral questions aside, I'm looking forward very much to hearing Leland Chen play the Sibelius Violin Concerto, which I'm sure will be the polar opposite of 'rough and woeful'; and may very well hale the souls out of our bodies.



## 2016 CAPTION COMPETITION – The Results!



The joint winners.....

"I had a short back and sides before I started practising"

– Judith Wanliss-Orlebar

Solitary Sinfonia – David Flockhart

"I never play Barber" – Alice Howdle

## Solway Sinfonia

Easterbrook Hall, Dumfries  
Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> November 7.30pm

Director: Geoffrey Keating  
Leader: Sarah Berker  
Soloist: Leland Chen, Violin

Berlioz: Hungarian March  
Sibelius: Violin, Concerto  
Dvorak: Symphony no.9 "From the New World"

Tickets £12, Students £6, accompanied schoolchildren free.  
Midsteple Box Office: 01387 253383  
[www.dgboxoffice.co.uk](http://www.dgboxoffice.co.uk)  
or on the door

# Patron's Piece: Jeff and Caroline Clayton

Solway Sinfonia. So (all sentences these days it seems have to begin with this word) why did we agree to become patrons of the Solway Sinfonia? Could it have something to do with the persistently persuasive talents of Robert Thurlow - he of the silver tongue as well as the silver bow (we won't mention the silver hair)? Well a bit!

But before Robert approached us we had already heard the Sinfonia in all its glory on a number of occasions over the years and did not need too much convincing that this was a collective talent that warranted support if we wished to continue to have the opportunity to hear good orchestral music within Dumfries and Galloway which is both affordable and nearby.

We also recognise that the Sinfonia serves to nurture locally based musicians and inspires improvement through practice of those with more modest musical accomplishment to 'keep at it'. Many years ago Jeff went 10 rounds with the violin and lost and found solace in the guitar where the frets at least gave some clue as to where the fingers should alight on the fret board. And now we speak as latecomers to the joys of formal tuition on the piano and classical guitar which only reinforces our respect and admiration for those who have mastered the language of music and can turn it into a coordinated, melodic whole in an apparently effortless way!

Your illustrious musical director, Geoff Keating, produces concerts which consistently get the right balance between well known pieces and those which are more challenging or less well aired.

One highlight of the year for financial supporters is always the 'Patrons Evening' where the musicians can indulge themselves in an eclectic mix of musical interludes which would not necessarily be certain to make it onto a typical Sinfonia programme!

All continued power to your elbows (and other anatomical structures used to make your music).

The photo shows Jeff and Caroline with Alex McQuiston, Director of Absolute Classics, discussing the Claytons' inaugural concert at Carnegie Hall scheduled for October 2026 – book now to ensure disappointment!



## Dates for your Diary

NOVEMBER 27 2016: 7.30 EASTERBROOK HALL

Tickets Dumfries Midsteeple 01387 253383

- Berlioz: Hungarian March
- Sibelius: Violin Concerto, Soloist Leland Chen
- Dvorak: New World Symphony

20th ANNIVERSARY YEAR:

MARCH 26 2017 7.30 EASTERBROOK HALL

Charity Gala Concert in aid of Music in Hospitals

- Beethoven: Movements from Piano Concerti 1-5, Murray McLachlan & family

JUNE 18 2017 5.30 CAERLAVEROCK NATURE RESERVE

Strawberries & Fizz with MIDSUMMER MUSIC IN THE BARN in aid of Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Caerlaverock.

SEPTEMBER 17 2017 2-5.30 Venue tbc.

Young People's Orchestral Day with the Solway Sinfonia.

NOVEMBER 26 2017 7.30 EASTERBROOK HALL.

Autumn Gala Concert:

- Shostakovich: Festival Overture
- Elgar: Sea Pictures, soloist Freya Jacklin Mezzo Soprano
- Tchaikovsky: Rococo Variations, soloist Kirsten Jenson, cello
- Poulenc: Suite: Les Biches

## MUSIDOKU - The Musical Sudoku

Level: Tuning Up

The rules are simple: just complete the empty boxes in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3 x 3 box contains one of each of the following musical symbols:



b							
♯	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮
♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭
♮	♯	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭
♮	♯	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭
♮	♯	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭
♮	♯	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭
♮	♯	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭

♯	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮
♮	♯	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭
♮	♯	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭
♮	♯	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭
♮	♯	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭
♮	♯	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭
♮	♯	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭
♮	♯	♮	♭	♮	♭	♮	♭

If you enjoyed these puzzles, why not buy the book containing 44 puzzles to tickle and tackle your musical brain cells - just £4.00 from all good music shops. ISBN 978-0-85249-897-2  
www.musidoku.com

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