

LUTON MUSIC CLUB

A HISTORY

1946-2013

Compiled & Written by Chris Thomas

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Foreword

Leafing through the pages of this book makes me realise what a remarkable organisation Luton Music Club is. Can there be any other music society as adventurous, as ambitious and as broad in its tastes as this one?

I am lucky enough to earn my living listening to classical music; introducing recordings in the studio and live performances at the Proms and at concert venues across the country and beyond. If this gives me any authority, it allows me to report that the breadth, the imagination and the flair of Luton Music is truly unique. This town is blessed with an exceptional chamber music series, presenting the glories of the standard repertoire and, unusually, daring to explore unfamiliar landscapes – both neglected works and the very latest in new writing. How many concert clubs and societies can justifiably claim such a key role in championing music? Beyond the dots on the page, the list of visitors proves the taste of generations of programmers, attracting big contemporary names, and skilfully selecting young, unknown artists, many of whom have gone on to be famous themselves.

That this success has been possible is thanks to the dedicated officers of the Club over the years, perhaps foremost amongst them Chris Thomas. For more than 40 years he has been exceptionally generous in sharing his time and knowledge, never more so than in the care he has taken producing this book. Reading through the details of over a thousand events across the history of Luton Music, I am not surprised at the extraordinary pride he takes in the organisation's achievements, both under his own inspired leadership and the leadership of those who went before him.

I commend this book, and in doing so salute Chris's marvellous gift of service to the club – a service to music, to musicians, to Luton itself and most importantly to myriad audiences of the future, surely the most significant part of his fine and continuing legacy.

Petroc Trelawny

President, Luton Music

Since Chris wrote this history, various people mentioned in these pages have died. The text remains, however, unaltered, reflecting Chris's thoughts and feelings at the time of writing.

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FOUNDATION

The Music Club's origins go back to the Second World War when an ENSA (Entertainments National Service Association) Music Club was formed in Luton in 1945. The ENSA music division closed down on 31 March 1946 and with it the old music club. But a month later, on 24 April, an open meeting was held at which it was decided to form a new, self-supporting music club. Rules were drawn up which stated that the objects of the Club should be "the exercise, study and enjoyment of good music in Luton which shall include the promotion of concerts, provision of lectures, recitals and other musical enterprises." These objectives would be modified in later years, but remained broadly the same until today. A Committee was established under the chairmanship of Richard Hopkins, Personnel Manager of Vauxhall Motors, which had set up its own music club which was to work with Luton Music Club for a number of years. The first President of the Music Club was Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Secretary, because of his work with ENSA when he was Minister of Labour.

The Monday weekly format was in place from the very start, with occasional events on Saturdays and other days organised in association with Vauxhall Music Club. The season lasted throughout the year from May to the end of April, apart from a short break in the summer when most of the town closed down for the annual holiday.

Most of the first programmes were given at Luton Technical College or Vauxhall Canteen. Few of them were live professional concerts - most were talks, gramophone evenings, quizzes, and live musical evenings generated by members of the Club. Remarkable from the outset was the obvious musical proficiency of many amateur members several of whom got together to present recitals or gave talks on specific themes or on music to be heard in forthcoming concerts. Some even composed music which was played at concerts. In due course a Music Club choir was formed.

Regular concerts by the London Philharmonic Orchestra in the Vauxhall Canteen, which had been organised by ENSA during the War, continued in September 1946 and for several years after that. For these the LPO took the financial risk but depended on the Luton and Vauxhall music clubs to sell tickets and to provide stewards and other help at the concerts. Sir Adrian Boult was the regular conductor and through his visits he became a well-known figure in Luton and a good friend of the Club, eventually succeeding Ernest Bevin as President. Other distinguished conductors also took the rostrum from time to time.

Club subscriptions were set at 5 shillings single and 7s 6d double although members had to buy tickets for professional concerts and recitals. Funding was provided in the form of grant aid by the Arts Council of Great Britain and in the first season the club received the tidy sum of £49 16s 8d. The Arts Council also provided help in other ways including suggestions for professional artists. Pianos were hired for specific concerts from Farmer's Music Shop in Upper George Street.

Planning of programmes was not done very far ahead at all. For some years programmes were published as the 'Autumn Programme' and the 'Spring Programme'. In due course the Arts Council of Great Britain strongly advised the club to plan at least three months ahead.

Press coverage does not seem to have been very good: a minute from 6 September reads "...the policy of the local press was considered to be most unhelpful to enterprises of our character." Similar criticisms were often voiced in subsequent minutes.

THE FIRST SEASON 1946-47

The season opened on 27 May with “an inaugural address, a gramophone recital illustrating the types of music to be heard and studied in the Club and ...a general talk on Club affairs.” The address was given by a Dr Lowry of the South-West Essex Technical College, although it is not clear why he was asked to undertake this important task. This modest event attracted 180 people. From then on there were a further 54 programmes until the season closed on 28 April, plus four concerts by the London Philharmonic Orchestra.



From the start, the Club managed to engage some very distinguished professionals, some of them not so famous today perhaps but in their day very well-known indeed. First among these was the pianist Liza Fuchsova, who had fled her native Czechoslovakia in 1939 to settle in England. A pillar of the London concert scene during the war she also pursued a successful European career. The selection of such eminent and often foreign artists was, for a music club in its infancy, quite remarkable. Later the season's pianists included the Polish Henryk Mierowski, presumably an émigré like Fuchsova, Irene Kohler, who had a glittering career world-wide and Irma Beatrix, about whom little is known.

Among singers were the renowned contralto Muriel Brunskill and the bass David Franklin – well known from his appearances at Glyndebourne and Covent Garden – who came twice, firstly in a recital which also featured the eminent violinist Leonard Hirsch, and later to talk about singing

Mozart. The name Thomas Matthews means little today but he was eminent enough to be included in a book *Violinists of Today* along with Menuhin, Kreisler, Szigeti, Milstein and the like. He and his pianist wife Eileen Ralf gave a recital.



Irene Kohler



Muriel Brunskill

Among speakers were Dr Paul Steinitz, the famous Bach specialist and founder of the London Bach Society and the Steinitz Bach Players, who had also been the ENSA Music Advisor for the Eastern Region. Dr Steinitz came to talk about the St Matthew Passion in Easter week. The Club also welcomed Julian Herbage, well-known for many years for his BBC Third Programme Music Magazine programme with Anna Instone. Sir Adrian Boult finally made it to the Club at the end of the season and hosted a question-and-answer evening, which rounded off the first season on a very distinguished note. Sir Adrian was shortly to become President of the Club which would begin a close association with the conductor.



Dr Paul Steinitz



Thomas Matthews by Herbert Whone

In the first season the membership rose quickly, from 233 in June, 389 in July, 435 in August and so on to reach a final 618 at the end of April!



Vauxhall Motors Canteen where orchestral and other concerts were held

THE 1947/48 SEASON

In the second season the pattern of events continued with several new features including a visit to the Proms, a ballet demonstration by members of the Royal Academy of Dancing, an organ recital and so on. John Thompson began his 'New Releases' series of presentations of new gramophone recordings: these were to continue for many years in association with Farmer's Music Shop where John worked at the time. The Saturday concerts continued although the Club maintained it was 'up against it' financially on these and urged members to find more patrons (so what's new?). Series tickets were introduced for these concerts to encourage more attendance. The handful of live professional concerts included appearances by the Kantrovich Piano Trio (Vera Kantrovich, Lily Phillips and Hilda Bor), the distinguished Hungarian pianist Joseph Weingarten and the young Russian pianist Alexis Kligerman.



Hilda Bor



Joseph Weingarten



Archie Camden

The idea of series of talks on various subjects began with four talks on major Viennese composers (Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Bruckner, Mahler) followed by four programmes on the history of opera. Series such as these became a feature of the Club seasons right up to the present day. Live opera made its first appearance at the Club in a 'fully-dressed'

presentation of excerpts by Intimate Opera, the first of many operatic offerings over the coming years mainly by Opera for All. Among other speakers were Sydney Harrison, well-known from his BBC broadcasts, the famous bassoonist Archie Camden and the conductor Dr Karl Rankl, Artistic Director of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Club meetings continued at Luton Technical College, either in the Main Hall or the Canteen, while the symphony concerts continued at the Vauxhall Canteen. Of these two were given by the LPO under James Robertson and Ernest Ansermet no less, with Cyril Smith and Eileen Joyce as soloists. A further two were given by the newly-formed Eastern Symphony Orchestra under Reginald Jacques, with Louis Kentner as soloist.



Luton Technical College, Park Square

Another innovation was a month-long exhibition called *The Growth of Music* which the Club arranged at the Museum in Wardown Park assisted by the Museum's curator and by Luton Art School. The exhibition assembled interesting instruments and manuscripts showing high points in the development of music. Some of the exhibits were borrowed from other museums in the country although many were provided by local people. The exhibition also endeavoured to tell something of the musical history of Luton itself.



Louis Kentner

The impressive membership figures for the first season did not hold up and the total struggled to reach 359, a fall of 42%. This was taken very seriously and caused a good deal of debate in committee meetings. It was agreed that 'the committee should circulate amongst members at Monday meetings, in an endeavour to start informal conversations, thus breaking down the natural reserve of individuals.' The Club became affiliated to the newly-

formed Luton Arts League, the forerunner of the Luton Arts Council, the objects of which were to encourage local culture and appreciation of fine arts.

THE 1948/49 SEASON

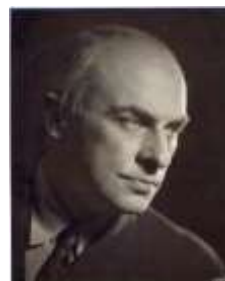
The number of professional events now declined somewhat. Although the orchestral concerts were still popular, one single LPO concert in November drawing 830 people, the chamber recitals were far less of a draw, with audiences as low as 50. As these were losing money there was an ongoing debate as to whether they were affordable, and there were several voices advocating younger, perhaps local, artists. Among the recitalists were the violinist Andrew Cooper, of whom little is now remembered, with pianist James Gibb, who did have a long and distinguished career, not least as a teacher. The only piano recital was given by Sheila Mossman, little known about now but remembered by the Sheila Mossman Memorial Prize for piano (Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music). Emanuel Hurwitz brought his recently formed Hurwitz String Quartet twice, the first time a professional quartet had played for the Club. This concert was the first major chamber music evening to be played on a Monday rather than Saturday. In a further departure from normal practice it was held in the small assembly hall at the Town Hall, although this space was later found to be unsatisfactory.



Emanuel Hurwitz



William Glock
c1950



Alan Bush



Sir Adrian Boult

Following on from the Viennese composers and opera series the previous season, two further enterprising series were arranged. The first comprised three talks on the history of the piano concerto, given by two Club members and by William Glock, who was at that time the Director of the Bryanston Summer School of Music. Later he was to become famous, if not notorious, as the Controller of Music at the BBC. The second series presented five talks on British music. The first of these, on music up to the death of William Byrd, was given by musicologist Michael Howard; the second, which took the story up to the 19th century was given by the broadcaster and writer on music John Culshaw, later to gain fame as a leading recording producer. The other three talks in this series brought return visits by William Glock, who concentrated on 20th century music.

Among other speakers were the composer Alan Bush, famous for his communist sympathies, who talked about Czech music and the distinguished author E.M.Forster, who talked on *The Reason d'être of Criticism*.



E.M.Forster

In September 1948 Sir Adrian Boult succeeded Ernest Bevin as the Club's President. There is no indication in the records as to why this change was made, although obviously Boult was a far more appropriate figurehead for a music society than Bevin. And at least Boult did visit the Club from time to time and, of course, regularly brought the LPO to Luton. Bevin was coming to the end of his political career by this time (he died in 1951) and may well have found his position too onerous to maintain a role with a voluntary organisation.

That same autumn the Club moved most of its events to Beech Hill School for Girls where the amenities were more attractive than at the Technical College where there had been some problems of conflict with the College's main activities. The membership at the end of the season was 226, a dramatic fall from the impressive start the Club had made. There was as much head-scratching about this problem as there still is today.

THE 1949/50 SEASON

The Club's programme continued with much the same pattern as before although the Committee made strenuous efforts to consult the members on the content and regularly responded to ideas and suggestions in order to keep the loyalty of their regular patrons. Most events were now on Mondays. The Club forged an association with the Luton branch of the English Folk-Dancing Society which in the coming years was to make a number of appearances. Fred Fensome, who was to play a very prominent part in the Club's activities for many years, appeared as a speaker for the first time and joined the Committee in September. Another committee member who became a leading light in the Club was Michael Marsh-Edwards, a composer of some note and sometime conductor of the Luton Bach Orchestra, which he founded, and of the Luton Symphony Orchestra. He was to present several talks over the next few seasons.

The Club had also been instrumental in setting up a festival which ran from 7th to 14th May involving all the other musical organisations in the town which at that time included Luton Choral Society, Luton Girls' Choir, Luton Bach Orchestra, Congreve Junior Orchestra, Luton Mandolin Band, Cecilian Accordion Band, County Technical School Musical Society, Kent's Works Band, the Skefco, Electrolux and Vauxhall choirs, Luton Grammar School Orchestra and Luton High School Choir and Orchestra. Eleven events were presented at various venues around the town.

Two symphony concerts were arranged: in February the LPO returned under its distinguished guest conductor Eduard van Beinum, playing Mendelssohn, Dvořák, Elgar, Debussy and Wagner. But the second concert which was to have been given by the London Symphony Orchestra under Josef Krips on a first visit to Luton, had to be cancelled. The venue for the LPO concert was the Alma Theatre. The theatre, built in 1929, stood on the corner of Alma Street and New Bedford Road. It was to become the regular venue for the LPO concerts until they ceased in 1954 when the theatre was about to be converted into the Cresta Ballroom. It was demolished in 1960.



Eduard van Beinum



Alma Theatre

Two more series were arranged. The first was three programmes devoted to the music of Schubert, with local musicians playing chamber music, including the Octet, a song recital (no singer recorded) and a programme of orchestral music on records. The second series focused on the symphony, in which three speakers discussed Haydn's *Surprise*, Beethoven's fourth and Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*.



Cyril Smith



Margaret Field-Hyde

However, there were no major professional chamber concerts apart from a song recital presented by the eminent soprano Margaret Field-Hyde, one of the great Purcell interpreters of her day and a piano recital by Cyril Smith, which exceptionally was presented at the Central Mission Hall. This recital drew an audience of 368 of which curiously only 123 were members (less than half the total membership which eventually reached 280).



Lord Harewood

Among the speakers the most prominent was the Earl of Harewood who talked about the revival of opera in England. A cousin of the then Princess Elizabeth, Lord Harewood was an authority on opera: at various times he was involved at Covent Garden, Sadler's Wells Opera, the Edinburgh Festival and the Leeds Festival. He founded *Opera* magazine, which he also edited for a time.



Kenneth Abbott

Another speaker was Dr Kenneth Abbott, organist and choirmaster of Luton Parish Church, who was to be involved with the Club regularly for many years.

THE 1950/51 SEASON

Programme patterns continued much as before. There was very little chamber or instrumental music, hardly any of it by professional artists. The one piano recital was given by Michal Hambourg. She is hardly a famous name now but in fact she was referred to as the last living link with the pianistic tradition of the 19th century, her father and grandfather having been eminent players, with teachers such as Anton Rubinstein and Paderewski. The engagement of Miss Hambourg cannot have been unconnected to the fact that she was married to Ian McPhail of the Arts Council of Great Britain, who had been involved with the Club for some time. He was in fact one of the speakers this season, just three months before Miss Hambourg's recital. Piano recitals were normally well supported but chamber music seems to have been less popular. Another problem was always the provision of a piano which frequently had to be hired, adding to the Club's costs.



Norman Del Mar



Elisabeth Lutyens



Karl Rankl

Illustrated talks continued to be the mainstay of the programme, many by Club members but some by distinguished visitors. The conductor Norman Del Mar came to talk about Sibelius' symphonies, the composer Elisabeth Lutyens spoke about



Douglas Craig

her own and other contemporary music, and Karl Rankl, musical director of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden returned to host a question-and-answer session. Opera seems to have been of great interest: it was the subject of quite a few talks, there were visits to Covent Garden and a concert of operatic music with four singers and a pianist, with Douglas Craig of Sadler's Wells Theatre, as compere.

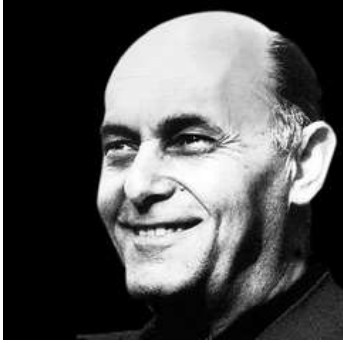
The series idea was also a favourite part of the Club's programme, it seems. This season four presentations were given about the instruments of the orchestra: committee member Margaret Brown on strings, illustrated by members of the local Philodorian Orchestra; Lewis Covey-Crump, himself a local bassoonist, and friends in the woodwind section; Emil Borsdorf, horn-player of the London Symphony Orchestra on brass; and the same orchestra's timpanist Henry Taylor on percussion. At the end of the season a four-part Mozart series was started, continuing into the 1951/52 season. The first of these, on the symphonies, was presented by John Culshaw. The other three talks were given by committee members.



Basil Cameron

1951 was the year of the Festival of Britain and an inter-organisational Festival Committee was set up in Luton to co-ordinate a festival in May that year. The Club would contribute two concerts, as part of its normal programme. The Club was also involved in the Festival exhibition organised by the Arts League of Luton.

The LPO concerts at the Alma Theatre continued with no less than four programmes between October and April. Sir Adrian Boult conducted the first in a programme of Bach, Dvořák, Stravinsky, Butterworth and Berlioz. Basil Cameron took the next two concerts, playing Mozart, Sibelius, Grieg, Ravel and Wagner in the first of these, and a whole evening of Tchaikovsky in the second. The fourth concert brought a collaboration with Luton Choral Society, with Arthur Davies conducting choir and orchestra in Elgar's *The Music Makers* and Borodin's



Georg Solti

Polovtsian Dances from *Prince Igor*. The remainder of the programme was given over to Beethoven, conducted by no less than Georg Solti, at a time when he was musical director of the Munich Opera. The symphony concerts were still supported by the Arts Council although the grant was expected to decrease as the Council took the view that the Club should move to becoming largely self-supporting.

Membership ended up at a reasonable 270 but the committee was nevertheless concerned about the numbers and attendances and planned various drives to attract new members and indeed simply to retain existing ones. The problems of 1950 seem little different to those of 2014.

THE 1951/52 SEASON

The season's period of activity was now curtailed in mid-July with a longer break – six weeks – before the following season resumed in September. This was done partly to reflect changing habits about summer holidays but also to reduce expenditure since the last 15 or so Club evenings were given by members with no expense to the club apart from booking the venue. The fact that there were very few professional musicians in the programme also reflected the financial stringency of the Club at this time. This season there was no professional chamber music at all and only one piano recital, which was given by Jill Buesst, daughter of Aylmer Buesst, the Australian conductor, teacher and scholar, who lived in St Albans and was President of the St Albans Orchestral Society. The Club drew increasingly on such local connections, including this season a return visit by the former Glyndebourne and Covent Garden bass David Franklin who taught at St Albans School in the 1940s and early 1950s. A throat condition had forced his retirement from singing in 1951.

The LPO concerts continued, however, with three events at the Alma Theatre conducted by Basil Cameron, Sir Adrian Boult and Eduard van Beinum. This last concert featured a piano concerto for the first time (Tchaikovsky No 1) in which the soloist was the French pianist Eliane Richepin. The concerts continued to be financially underwritten by the Arts Council and now also by Bedfordshire County Council. Orchestral music was also provided in the first concert for the Club by the Luton Youth Orchestra under their conductor, Michael Marsh-Edwards. They played an ambitious programme of Handel, Vivaldi, Corelli and Peter Warlock.

Among the speakers was the Hungarian composer Mátyás Seiber who had settled in England in 1935: he gave a talk on the music of Bela Bartók. The British composer Alan Bush returned to talk about his opera *Wat Tyler* composed in 1948-50 but not staged in England until 1974: this delay almost certainly reflected the Establishment's attitude to Bush's communist sympathies, which discouraged performances of much of his music. Lionel Salter, the Director of Music of the BBC European Service,



Eliane Richepin Mátyás Seiber

and later to become Head of Music for BBC Television, spoke on *The Trials of a Record Reviewer*, while another critic and writer on music, William Mann, gave a talk on Berg's opera *Wozzeck*, which was to have its first UK performance at Covent Garden the evening after his talk.

Members also contributed talks notably in the four-programme series *Music and Musicians of Four Countries*, in which the music of France, the USA, Russia and Italy was discussed. The Mozart series, begun in the previous season, was also concluded with two further events.

But the most significant visitor – although not obvious at the time – was the 31-year-old Antony Hopkins, who was to become so very much involved with the Club up to the present day. He was billed as a 'skilled and witty lecturer'.



Antony Hopkins



George Thalben-Ball

The main venue continued to be Beech Hill School with occasional use of other halls, including several events at the Parish Church, not least of which was a recital by George Thalben-Ball, one of the most eminent organists this country has ever produced.

Audience numbers and membership continued to be a headache. By the end of the season membership had reached only 184 compared with 270 a year earlier. It is amusing and salutary to read of some of the ideas the Committee came up with, since they all seem too familiar. For instance, each current member was asked to bring one new person with a view to enlisting another member. The Committee was asked to wear identification badges so that

newcomers knew who to ask for information. And, according to the AGM minutes in May 1952, "it was suggested that the words 'Luton Music Club' on the posters etc. might be made less apparent, as non-members might be given the impression that the programme advertised did not apply to them."

THE 1952/53 SEASON

The season's period was now somewhat reduced with a mere forty events plus three LPO concerts and two Luton Youth Orchestra concerts. Two programme brochures were now to be produced instead of three. The season ran from the beginning of September to Christmas, with a three-week break then, resuming in January to mid-May when there was a three-week break for Whitsun and the Coronation, after which six more events concluded the season. Club members continued to bear the major responsibility for presenting programmes, either on record or in live music-making. The latter included a performance of Bach's fifth Brandenburg Concerto, which sounds extremely ambitious. There was even an attempt to get members physically involved by participating in a square dancing demonstration by the English Folk Dance and Song Society, and by the Cambridgeshire Music Advisor encouraging volunteers to become opera singers for the evening! The concept of series programmes seems to have been popular with one series following hard on the heels of another. This season Brahms was the focus of three presentations, one on the orchestral works, one on the concertos and a third on the chamber music and songs.



Joan Ryall

There was somewhat more live chamber and instrumental music this season with a piano trio and a piano recital, using what appears to have been local musicians. A single professional piano recital was given by Joan Ryall, better known as part of a famous piano duet team with Joan Clark rather than as a solo pianist. Otherwise professional live music-making could not be afforded without support from the Arts Council, which was not forthcoming. Vocal music was provided by the Harpenden Light Operatic Society in a Gilbert and Sullivan programme and by a small local choir called The Occasional Singers in a concert of Elizabethan madrigals and motets.

But talks by professionals continued and were very popular. The well-known critic and music writer Alec Robertson gave a talk simply called *The Enjoyment of Music*, while Eric Ball, who has been dubbed 'the father of the brass band' came to speak on composing for brass. Harold Rosenthal, Archivist of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and Editor of *Opera* magazine, asked *Is the Art of Great Singing Dead?* There was also a contribution from the composer John Gardner, and Antony Hopkins returned for his second visit.



Eric Ball



John Gardner

The LPO returned to Alma Theatre three times, under Boult, Cameron and Norman Del Mar. Once again a piano concerto was included, with Alfred Kitchin playing Rachmaninov's second. These concerts were now supported by the Arts Council and by Luton Borough Council following the withdrawal of support from Bedfordshire County Council.

Membership fell slightly to 174.

THE 1953/54 SEASON

This season saw a noticeable increase in the number of live music evenings, given mainly by local musicians, all now forgotten. But pianist Joan Ryall returned and Kenneth Abbott came out of the organ loft to share a piano duet evening with Noreen Hudson. Augustus Lowe, apparently a professional pianist with St Albans connections, gave a Chopin birthday recital, while no less than four chamber music groups contributed welcome live events. One of these, the Chelsea Ensemble, appears to have been professional: certainly the pianist, Harold Lester, was a well-known keyboard player working with people like Cathy Berberian, Ida Haendel and Alfred Deller. Another of these groups featured the soprano Elizabeth Crooke, who later joined the Glyndebourne Chorus and lived at my own village, Gravenhurst, where she was well-known. Membership fell slightly to 167.



Harold Lester

Novelties included a demonstration of handbell ringing (not for a whole evening, though!) and the debut of the Club's own choir, formed and conducted by committee member Alfred Yallop.

Among the outside speakers were Norman Del Mar talking about the music of Carl Nielsen, and the conductor and pianist/harpsichordist Lionel Salter, although his subject is not recorded. A further series was arranged, this time devoted to the music of Beethoven, with presentations on the symphonies, the piano music, the concertos and the chamber music.

There were three concerts by the LPO, all given as usual at the Alma Theatre. As always these attracted large audiences, the average for this season being about 164. Despite this the concerts invariably made a loss. The conductors were Boult, Cameron and, for the first time, the Kiev-born Anatole Fistoulari who had been briefly the principal conductor of the orchestra in 1943/44. His programme included the Andante from Mahler's fifth symphony, which was appropriate as he was married to Mahler's daughter, Anna. Once again a piano concerto was included in the series, with the distinguished Colin Horsley playing the Grieg.



Anatole Fistoulari



Colin Horsley

THE 1954/55 SEASON

The pattern of events continued in much the same way: a handful of live chamber music concerts, and many talks and gramophone presentations often by Club members (who seem to have been not only very knowledgeable but also quite youthful, some of them at least). The Club sought return visits from a number of people including the opera critic and author Harold Rosenthal, the 'versatile personality' Antony Hopkins (on his fourth visit, reflecting his popularity with members), pianists Augustus Lowe and Joan Ryall and others. The Music Club Choir tackled Dyson and Bach, while the All Saints Light Operatic Society presented excerpts from some of their productions. John Thompson's *New Releases* record presentations continued but he started to bring in speakers from the record companies (Decca and Vox this season) rather than do it himself. Among the outside speakers was Charles Mackerras, who was then at Sadler's Wells Opera and had also recently become principal conductor of the London Concert Orchestra. There was also a visit by the influential music critic and journalist Andrew Porter, who gave an appreciation of Kathleen Ferrier, who had died in 1953. Altogether there were now forty programmes in the season.



Charles Mackerras



Andrew Porter

A major setback was the forced abandonment of the LPO concerts. This was due to the planned redevelopment of the Alma Theatre, which was to become the Cresta Ballroom. Initially the only other venue for the concerts might have been the Vauxhall Canteen where the concerts had first been held, but the orchestra's management decided that this space was no longer suitable. Later the Ritz and

Savoy cinemas were investigated but nothing came of that. The LPO did return for a time in 1959, playing at the Cresta Ballroom as will be seen. The gap left by the LPO was to be taken by the newly-formed Luton Bach Orchestra under Michael Marsh-Edwards. At much the same time Kenneth Abbott formed the Luton Bach Choir, which gave its first concerts for the Club in November and February.

The Club continued to arrange visits for members to London venues, including the Royal Albert Hall, the Royal Festival Hall, Covent Garden and Sadler's Wells. These were invariably very popular.

In July The Club reached its 400th Monday meeting. The membership remained steady at 166.

THE 1955/56 SEASON

Michael Marsh-Edwards' Luton Bach Orchestra got under way with two concerts in October and February given at the Parish Church. The first included a Handel organ concerto, a Vivaldi violin concerto and Bach's fourth Brandenburg Concerto, with various local soloists. The second concert featured Corelli's Christmas Concerto, a violin concerto by Torelli, the Double Violin Concerto by Vivaldi and Bach's fifth Brandenburg, plus arias by Bach and Handel sung by Chloe Howard.

There was a handful of live chamber music programmes, some given by local musicians and at least two by visiting professionals. Among these was a violin and piano recital by Andrew and Robin McGee, still in their twenties. Andrew had studied conducting with Boult who had very likely suggested him to the Club. He went on to work with the Covent Garden Orchestra, the LSO, London Sinfonietta and the Nash Ensemble. He became a great expert on Paganini. The baritone Philip Hattey is similarly little known today but he was regarded as an up-and-coming young artist in 1936 when the concert agents Ibbs and Tillet took him on: he gave an all-English song recital with pianist Bessie Burdekin.



Andrew McGee



Valentine Britten

Among the speakers was Valentine Britten, the Head of the BBC Gramophone Library since 1942, who was sufficiently well-known to be Roy Plomley's guest on *Desert Island Discs* a few months after her Luton date. Sir Adrian Boult and Antony Hopkins made their by now regular visits, but a new face was William

Wordsworth, little regarded nowadays but the composer of eight symphonies, six string quartets and much else.

Member's talks included a new series of five presentations to mark Mozart's bicentenary, the fifth of which was held over until the following season.

The tenth anniversary of the Club was marked by a festival concert in May given by the Luton Youth Symphony Orchestra conducted by Michael Marsh-Edwards. Jill Buesst returned to play Grieg's concerto while the remainder of the programme included Nicolai's *Merry Wives of Windsor* overture, Brahms' *Academic Festival Overture*, Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* March No 4 and a ballet suite by one Guy Halahan.



William Wordsworth

The membership remained steady at 164.

THE 1956/57 SEASON

Owing to financial constraints professional contributions fell to almost nothing and it was left to the committee's imagination to devise a varied and stimulating mix using the members and local musicians, many of them amateurs. It was remarkable that, nevertheless, 40 Club evenings were arranged between September and July. These did include quite a bit of live music ranging from a piano recital by Dennis Hunt, who appears to have been professional, to the national prizewinning Luton Band, from a programme of recorder solos and ensembles to an organ recital at King Street Congregational Church.

Vocal music seems to have been much less of a deterrent than it can be today. Not only were there choral concerts by The Hertfordshire Singers and The Chiltern Singers but the members contributed with a performance of Mozart's little opera *Bastien and Bastienne* and a rehearsal of choruses from Vaughan Williams' opera *Hugh the Drover*. The Music Club Choir contributed two programmes in one of which they were joined by the Music Club Orchestra! There was a song recital by Mercy Collisson, the formidable rector's daughter from Gravenhurst, and talks on Italian opera, Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and Gilbert and Sullivan.

The Luton Bach Orchestra presented three more concerts at the Parish Church, conducted as usual by Michael Marsh-Edwards, and using local soloists in concertos and other concertante works.

Visits to London concerts and opera were abandoned for the time being because of transport problems occasioned by petrol rationing. The venue continued to be Beech Hill Girl's School. Membership fell to 138.

R.R. Hopkins, Club Chairman from the beginning to 1952 and a vice-president thereafter, wrote the following comments on ten years of the Club:

"I well remember the Club beginnings. During the war and immediately afterwards all sorts of bodies endeavoured to provide cultural entertainment. What seemed to surprise many of these bodies was that their efforts met with success! It was a time when people felt starved of good music, drama, pictures etc. and they rallied round any worthwhile presentations of this kind... The Luton Music Club came into being because there were people who didn't want to see this kind of thing fade out after the war. They recognised that the job had got to be done differently, but they still felt there was a job to be done.

"As a matter of fact, those particular pioneers had a surprise also. They thought the Club might stage an event of some kind monthly or fortnightly....They never contemplated weekly meetings held regularly over a decade! And this has been despite difficulties which could not at that time have been foreseen – being moved about and having to pay for accommodation; the continued non-availability of a suitable hall for large-scale concerts; the fact that the Arts Council has found it increasingly necessary to spend more of its money in London and the larger centres and withdraw its support from our pattern of weekly Club activity. Perhaps the Club has settled down at a more modest membership than was once hoped for. We used to think of 1000 membership or even more – such figures had been achieved elsewhere. But when all the factors are taken into account, the present loyal following of 150 or so members, with an average of 60 regular attenders compares very well with anything else which has happened in this part of the world during the same period.

"It is fair to claim that the standard of presentation offered has remained high. A very large proportion of top-line lecturers have visited the Club, although it has to be admitted that efforts to build up a satisfactory and near-economic support for individual artistes, recitals etc. have never been really successful. The greatest tragedy has doubtless been our inability to carry on with the symphony concerts which had been so successfully established at the Alma Theatre. Despite the most strenuous efforts no alternative accommodation has been found. Against this, the Club can pride itself on having provided a platform for competent local artistes and ensembles, amongst them the Luton Youth Symphony Orchestra. And so this year the Club celebrates its 10th birthday. Some of its founder members are still 'on the job'; some of us have been compelled to take a back seat. But the Club goes on, the leadership and initiative are still there, and there's no reason why the next 10 years shouldn't be more successful still."

THE 1957/58 SEASON

Membership continued to decline, falling to 121, a drop of 12%. This was as alarming then as it is now, and every effort was made to chase people who had not renewed subscriptions and to reduce costs in all aspects of the Club's activities. However, the amount of live music-making continued, mainly by local and amateur musicians who played for expenses. Resort was inevitably made to gramophone recordings, including a 7-part series *Symphony Concert on Records*, enterprisingly featuring all seven of Sibelius' symphonies.



Ruth Railton

One distinguished speaker was Ruth Railton, the founder of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain in 1948. Interestingly, although of no great consequence to this history, she was married to Cecil Harmsworth King, owner of the Mirror Group Newspapers.

The violinist Jürgen Hess was another well-known name, certainly later on. He was leader of the English Chamber Orchestra and a member of several chamber groups including the Delmé String Quartet which played in Luton a number of times later on. Jürgen returned to the Club in later years with his family, all very talented musicians.

The Luton Bach Orchestra continued their contribution with three concerts. Their conductor Michael Marsh-Edwards formed another band, the amateur Lyrian Orchestra, which gave two concerts in the season but then seems to have disappeared.

The Dolmetsch family, well-known at the time and for many years afterwards for their championship of early music, came to give an illustrated talk on the day of the centenary of the birth of the family's musical founder Arnold Dolmetsch. A neat bit of programming!

Visits to London were resumed with trips arranged to a Promenade Concert and to Sadler's Wells Opera. These were quite popular but no doubt took a fair amount of organising, including the hiring of a coach.

In the late summer of 1957 Sir Adrian Boult told the Club that, due to a recent indisposition, he was obliged to cut back on various commitments including the Presidency of the Club. He was succeeded by Norman Del Mar, the conductor and writer on music who had visited the Club on more than one occasion, including November 1957. He was elected as President at the AGM in June 1958 but did not last long in the role: it is not clear why he relinquished the appointment (presumably it was his initiative and not the Club's!) and he was succeeded in 1959 by Antony Hopkins who has continued in the role until now.

The Club was beset by various problems at this time, as reported in the Luton News:

"The Music Club held its annual general meeting on Monday evening and unfortunately the Secretary had to report that in this, the twelfth year of the Club's existence, membership was again down on the two previous years.... Owing to the decline in membership and the consequent diminution of income, the Committee has found it increasingly difficult to arrange programmes: live programmes may be popular, but when they can only be given if the artistes concerned agree to perform for no fee at all, or for a reduced fee, then there is clear evidence of lack of support. There has been some discussion of the possibility of changing the meeting-place of the Club, and also of altering the day of the week on which meetings take place. It seems a pity that an institution which has established a twelve year tradition of a regular Monday evening meeting should now have to abandon that tradition. In the past the Club has played an active and useful part in the musical life of the town, and it is to be hoped that the new Committee will be able to call upon more enthusiastic support in the twelvemonth to come." The Club was preoccupied with the same concerns fifty years later!

THE 1958/59 SEASON

The 36 programmes this season included an extraordinary amount of vocal music, which may surprise us who find it does not hold so much popular appeal. There were choral contributions from the Luton Parish Church Choir, Luton Grammar School Choir, Stopsley Girls School Choir, the Music Club's own choir (two concerts), and the Dorian Singers. The two Luton Bach Orchestra concerts both included a soprano soloist, while there were two song recitals, a *Songs from the Shows* programme, and a vocal quartet from Bedford, not to mention talks on operatic expression and interpretation and on British folk songs.



Douglas Tate

One famous name making his first appearance at the Club was the 25-year-old harmonica player Douglas Tate. He was a local young man, living at Stotfold, who had several early competition successes including a major triumph at the Wembley Music Festival in 1957. He was later to become Britain's first World Harmonica Champion at Karlsruhe, Germany in 1967. Along with people like Tommy Reilly, Tate made the harmonica a 'respectable' instrument and created a considerable public interest in learning it.

Otherwise it was not a vintage season for famous names, but nevertheless the Club managed to increase the membership to 144, a gratifying rise of almost 20%. As has happened in more recent times, the day of the week for programmes was debated extensively but there was no strong move for a change from Mondays. One change which was just as significant was a move of venue from Beech Hill Girls' School to the

Luton Technical Institute, Park Square, which had just been renamed the Luton College of Technology (later to develop into the University of Luton/Bedfordshire). A new hall had been constructed there which was better suited to the Club's needs than the school. Committee meetings were also held there.

As now, the Committee was always looking for donations from members in addition to their subscriptions. A nice minute in July 1959 records that it was noted that members and guests left larger donations when reminded to do so at the meetings. The Chairman agreed to make a special point of asking for donations at each meeting and to ask members to be a little more co-operative when leaving donations with the Assistant Treasurer. 'Meetings', it should be noted, meant the weekly programmes, not committee gatherings.

As a further means of increasing Club funds, the Committee was starting to look at seeking financial aid from various sources including the Gulbenkian Trust, the National Federation of Music Societies, ITV, the Arts Council of Great Britain, the Nuffield Foundation and the Ford Trust. Little progress was achieved with most of these approaches.

Another echo of present times was the decision to inform music teachers in secondary schools of forthcoming concerts and to invite students to come free of charge. Only one reply was received, from Adolphe Hauke, Head of Music at Luton Grammar – who was a member of the Club!

THE 1959/60 SEASON

At last the London Philharmonic Orchestra was able to return to give two more concerts. These were in the Cresta Ballroom which had been converted from the old Alma Cinema. But it was not really suitable for concerts as the seats had to be put out each time, there was no rake in the auditorium and staging had to be introduced for the orchestra. However, the LPO's visits there were short-lived as a redevelopment was being planned by the Ballroom owners and notice was given to the Club that no further bookings would be taken after February 1960. The Club then began to explore other venues including the College of Technology, Vauxhall Canteen, and the Ritz and Odeon cinemas. The LPO management eventually decided that the Ritz Cinema was the best of the suggestions. The two concerts in the Cresta were in November 1959, conducted by



Iris Loveridge



Uto Ughi

Hugo Rignold and featuring pianist Iris Loveridge, and in February 1960, conducted by Basil Cameron (not by the advertised Sir Malcolm Sargent who was indisposed) and featuring the 16-year-old Italian violinist Uto Ughi. The Luton Bach Orchestra augmented these concerts with three further programmes.

Among the Club events were return visits from Douglas Craig of Sadler's Wells, the violinist Jürgen Hess, the harmonica player Douglas Tate, who came with a string quartet, Dr Kenneth Abbott who had now returned as organist and choirmaster at the Parish Church, and of course the new President, Antony Hopkins. He gave a talk on writing his musical, *Johnny the Priest*, which was to be performed in April 1960 at the Princes Theatre, London. The Club arranged a coach party to see it.



John Myatt

One new name on the roster was that of John Myatt, the clarinettist who founded the well-known woodwind and brass shop in Hitchin. John was to become a very good friend to the Club for many years not only by regular personal attendance but also by modest funding contributions. In October 1959 he made his first appearance at the Club with two violinists and two pianists.

Membership continued to increase with 192 at the end of the season, a very considerable 33% leap of support. In May 1960 it was decided to apply to join the National Federation of Music Societies in the hope that they could assist with funding more professional chamber music concerts.

THE 1960/61 SEASON

This season was curtailed to just over thirty programmes, running from mid-September to mid-April. Three Celebrity Concerts were introduced: Opera for All performing Rossini's *Barber of Seville* in the first of many visits in the coming years, the Aeolian String Quartet, the first major quartet to appear at the Club, and a piano recital by Iris Loveridge, returning for her second visit. She was also destined to perform for the Club on several occasions.

These concerts were supported by a modest grant (£20!) from the National Federation of Music Societies, which the Club had recently joined. In December the Club signed up to the Federation's Block Insurance Scheme whereby, for a modest outlay, the Club was protected for a number of potential financial problems such as cancellation of concerts. At the end of April the Federation's regional Annual General Meeting was held conveniently at Luton Hoo and a number of committee members attended. During the meeting John Thompson was elected onto the Regional Committee, the beginning of an involvement which was to last for many years.



The Aeolian String Quartet in 1960

Members themselves continued to contribute extensively not least in an operatic double bill of Pergolesi's *La serva padrona* and a piece by Percy M. Heywood entitled *The Batsman's Bride*, a parody of Gilbert and Sullivan composed in 1957, and the first operetta written on the subject of cricket! And a talk on brass instruments included a work specially composed for the occasion by Brian Lane and played by all members of the audience! It is extraordinary to find that industries such as Laporte's and English Electric had started up their own music clubs (Vauxhall Motors had had one since at least 1946) and one of the Club

programmes was a music quiz between the three clubs, devised by Leslie Bedford and his son Steuart. The Bedfords had already appeared earlier in the season, with Steuart's brother David, in a programme about the music of Liza Lehmann, Leslie Bedford's mother. Steuart Bedford of course, became a well-known conductor and was much associated with Britten and Aldeburgh, while David Bedford became a well-known and highly original composer who visited the Club a good deal in later years.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra concerts were transferred, as planned, to the Ritz Cinema in Gordon Street. This was not all that satisfactory and involved extra costs for a stage extension and extra lighting hire and installation. Furthermore all this had to be set up after the cinema showings on Saturday night in readiness for orchestral rehearsal at 11 am on Sunday morning. Tickets for the first concert in October under Boult did not sell too well and doubts arose about the second concert in April which was to be under Sir Malcolm Sargent. However, this did go ahead in the end and 'Flash' declared himself 'well pleased' with everything. The London Bach Orchestra also contributed its usual two concerts.

Gratifyingly, the membership continued to rise reaching 228 by the end of the season.

THE 1961/62 SEASON

The season reverted to 36 programmes ending at the end of June rather than April. Four Celebrity Concerts were arranged supported financially by the NFMS. These began with Opera for All in *The Marriage of Figaro*, produced by Douglas Craig who was becoming a regular visitor to the Club.



Robert Spencer

Then followed a piano recital by John Barstow, winner of the first National Federation of Music Societies Award for Young Concert Artists in 1961, a scheme which the Club was to support regularly in the future. John Barstow went on to have a distinguished career as a teacher and taught many of the young pianists who later played at the Club. The third of these concerts brought a recital by the husband-and-wife team of mezzo Jill Nott-Bower and baritone and lutenist/guitarist Robert Spencer who were destined to return to the Club on several occasions. And finally violinist Jürgen Hess brought a newly-formed Conway Ensemble playing Mozart, Haydn, Fauré and Schubert. Unfortunately the Celebrity Concerts made a considerable loss of £86, a lot of money then, and doubts were aired as to whether they could be continued.



Francesco Mander



Beryl Kimber

The LPO concerts continued at the Ritz cinema, the first in October under Boult with Colin Horsley returning to play Tchaikovsky's Concerto No 1, and the second in February under the Italian conductor and composer Francesco Mander, little remembered these days, with the young Australian violinist Beryl Kimber playing the Brahms concerto. The Luton Bach Orchestra gave two more concerts, moving into newer repertoire – Prokofiev and Lennox Berkeley!



Stuart Bedford

Among other contributors were duo pianists Stuart Bedford and Martin Jones, the musicologist Denis Stevens who was editor of Grove's Dictionary at the time, Arthur Davies, the founder and director of the Luton Girls' Choir and the rock and jazz guitarist Alexis Korner.

Sadly, membership fell dramatically, from 228 to 166. Ah, the fickle public!

THE 1962/63 SEASON

The major development was the inauguration of the new Central Library which was opened by The Queen on 2 November. The building incorporated a 252-seat theatre - imaginatively called the Library Theatre - on the third floor. It was originally referred to as a lecture theatre although some of the very first events were ballet and opera. It had very little room backstage: only two dressing rooms behind the stage and minimal space in the wings. It is incredible how opera and ballet could be staged there at all. Outside was what was laughingly called a roof garden. The Borough Council had seen fit to buy a piano – a Blüthner Model B which is still in use. When not in use, the piano's storage was a perpetual headache as it could only be put in the small wing space stage right and was therefore in everyone's way. When opera and ballet were presented the piano had to be lowered on to the floor of the auditorium, a job which could only be handled by professional piano movers, at a cost. The lighting was fairly basic and the rake of the floor was much shallower than now. Seating was in one central block with aisles at the sides rather than the one centre aisle as now. The acoustic was very dry for music – and still is. Front of house facilities were limited to tea and coffee – there was no bar. But, in spite of all these shortcomings, many of which were to be addressed in the coming years, the Theatre was regarded as a very fine facility when compared with Luton's other performing spaces at the time.



The opening of the building was celebrated with a week of events organised by the Library and Luton Arts Council, and the Music Club was invited to contribute an event on the Monday. The Club chose opera! Intimate Opera performed Thomas Arne's *The Cooper* in a double bill with Antony Hopkins' *Three's Company*. For the remainder of the season the Club continued to use the College of Technology for most of its programmes but took advantage of the new venue on a few occasions including - amazingly enough in view of the foregoing comments about space – Opera for All in Puccini's *La bohème* and Cimara's *The Secret Marriage*. Opera for All were clearly undeterred by the theatre's limitations since they returned annually for many years. Ballet was also programmed

regularly with Western Theatre Ballet, Minerva Ballet and Harlequin Ballet all making appearances: the problem here was that the sightlines were such that it was difficult to see the dancers' feet!

Apart from Opera for All, vocal music continued to feature quite strongly in the programmes, what with an evening of Gilbert and Sullivan highlights, a talk by John Culshaw of Decca Records on producing recorded opera, a talk on Wagner and no less than three song recitals, including one by the baritone Malcolm Singer, later well-known for his arts programme *Tabs* on BBC Three Counties Radio.



Hamish Milne



Clive Lythgoe

There were two piano recitals by artists who later became very distinguished – Hamish Milne and Clive Lythgoe. The 23-year-old Milne was just embarking on a career which was to take him all over the world as a soloist and chamber musician. He also played for the Club many years later. Lythgoe was a very popular pianist in the 1950s and 1960s but later suffered something of a breakdown due to the pressures of fame and his career practically vanished.



Felix Aprahamian



Edward Greenfield

There were also visits from two influential critics, Felix Aprahamian and Edward Greenfield. Aprahamian was the music critic of *The Sunday Times*, and gave a talk on Debussy to mark the centenary of the composer's birth. Edward Greenfield, the record critic of *The Guardian* and *The Gramophone Magazine*, spoke on the job of a record reviewer. Both were frequently heard on BBC Radio 3 and became influential broadcasters.

The Luton Bach Orchestra continued its concerts but moved them to Saturdays as independent promotions. The concerts by the London Philharmonic Orchestra seem to have ceased, at least under Luton Music Club promotion.

The Club became affiliated to the Luton Arts Council (the successor to the Luton Arts League). The Council later became responsible for distributing Borough Council grants to Luton voluntary arts organisations. At the Club's Annual General Meeting it was decided that seasons should in future run from mid-September to the end of April, around thirty programmes. It was further decided that celebrity lectures promoted by the Library itself and record recitals promoted by Farmer's music shop should be arranged for Mondays and integrated into the Club's season.

Membership this season was a modest 138.

THE 1963/64 SEASON

The Club now moved into the Library Theatre permanently. Despite the novelty and attraction of a proper performing space, the move did not enhance the membership numbers which were 144.

The mix of 29 programmes continued to be much as before with plenty of talks and record programmes intermixed with live music by local musicians, young professional artists and the occasional established 'star'. Celebrity concerts were introduced not only as a way of highlighting the plums in the programme but also to raise extra revenue by charging an admission fee over and above the subscription. This season the five such concerts included Harlequin Ballet, the Amici String Quartet with popular pianist Iris Loveridge returning again, a recital by Welsh pianist Eira West and two visits from Opera for All, presenting *Don Pasquale* in October and *Così fan tutte* in February. Harlequin Ballet (1959-1968) was a small-scale touring company run by John and Barbara Gregory. The Gregorlys choreographed many of the dances performed by the company but works by guest choreographers such as Anton Dolin, Tamara Karsavina and Alexander Roy were also toured. The Amici Quartet (Lionel Bentley & Michael Jones, violins, Christopher Wellington, viola and Peter Halling, cello) was a highly reputable ensemble active at this time. Eira West was at one time the pianist with a small operatic group founded in Adelaide in 1957 and called the Intimate Opera Group. It was modelled on the British ensemble, the Intimate Opera Company, which had opened the Club's season in the Library Theatre. More curious still, the Australian group took Antony Hopkins' *Three's Company*, which was in the Luton 1962/63 programme, into its repertoire.



Leon Goossens



Gerald Moore



Ken Sykora

The *New Record Releases* series continued as one of the most popular draws: organised by John Thompson in association with Farmer's music shop, they started to be presented by record producers and other musical personalities and occasionally included a well-known leading musician keen to promote new recordings. Those attending the programmes could claim a discount from the music shop on

any of the featured records. There were no less than four of these programmes this season, one of which included a short recital by the renowned oboist Leon Goossens. The Club continued to attract eminent people to give talks, which were very popular with audiences. Among the speakers this season were the doyen of accompanists, Gerald Moore, the controversial critic and broadcaster Hans Keller, who celebrated Benjamin Britten's 50th birthday, and the jazz guitarist Ken Sykora.

THE 1964/65 SEASON

More and more live music and fewer talks was becoming the norm by this time, much use being made of promising youngsters at the start of their careers. Typical was the Albern String Quartet, here making the first of many appearances over the coming years. They had only recently been formed at the Royal Academy of Music (1961), with Dennis Simons as leader and Howard Davis as second violin. Howard was to take over as leader in the 1960s and continued in that role until he retired through ill-health in 2005 – sadly he was to die in 2008, aged 67. The quartet members were good friends of the Club for years to come.



Albern Quartet (later than 1964)



Joy Hyman & Jennifer Rice



Cyril Smith & Phyllis Sellick

Opera and ballet featured again with a return visit from Harlequin Ballet and two visits by Opera for All performing Rossini's *Cinderella (La Cenerentola)* and a double bill of Puccini's *The Cloak (Il tabarro)* and *Susanna's Secret* by Wolf-Ferrari. Indeed vocal music continued to be programmed quite often, contrary to current practice as already noted. There were two song recitals (including another visit from baritone Malcolm Singer), a voice and guitar programme from Joy Hyman and Jennifer Rice (to become firm favourites at the Club), the local Ionian Singers and talks on settings of the requiem mass and on Bach's cantatas.

Once again there were four programmes of *New Record Releases* in one of which EMI brought the celebrated three-hand piano duo Cyril Smith and Phyllis Sellick. Other piano contributions came from the 23-year-old Marlene Fleet who had just made her Wigmore Hall debut, and the almost as young Swedish virtuoso Lennart Rabes who was later to become a leading Liszt expert.

The last celebrity Concert was something of a curiosity: the Berwang Clarinet Quintet. Berwang is a village in the Austrian Tirol in which a holiday music course is held every year. It seems most probable that the clarinet quintet was formed for the occasion, but, it seems, one of the violinists was the young Peter Cropper, who founded the Lindsay Quartet in 1965. Maybe the other string players in the Quintet were to become the other Lindsay players. And so perhaps the Club had engaged the Lindsays when they were at their chrysalis stage!

Membership remained at much the same level – 138.

THE 1965/66 SEASON

Once again opera and ballet dominated the series of five Celebrity Concerts, with Opera for All bringing productions of *La traviata* and *The Abduction from the Seraglio* in October and January respectively, and the Ballets Minerva, making its first appearance at the Club. This company, formed around 1953 under the direction of Edward Gaillard with the objective of taking ballet to “the small theatreless towns in remote parts of the British Isles”. One of its dancers, Richard Holden, recalled in his memoirs that “it was a pint-sized company, or ballet-in-a-nutshell – but they wanted to, and actually did provide more than a pint measure of entertainment for the largely family audiences. It maintained high standards of performance, touring all of England on a bus especially fitted to accommodate all nine of us plus costumes and scenery. It always had enthusiastic and devoted audiences and got good notices.” The other two Celebrity Concerts were given by the St Cecilia Piano Quartet, of which nothing is known and the popular piano duet team Joan Ryall and June Clark. Joan Ryall had played solo recitals on three previous visits but this was the first visit with her duet partner.



Joan Ryall and June Clark



John Culshaw

John Culshaw was becoming a regular presenter in the *New Record Releases* series and came to the Club several times. He was a pioneering English classical record producer for Decca Records. He recorded a wide range of music, but is best known for masterminding the first studio recording of Wagner's *Der*

Ring des Nibelungen, begun in 1958 and conducted by Sir Georg Solti. Among other speakers was the composer Robert Simpson, who talked about his beloved Carl Nielsen marking the centenary of the Danish composer's death. Dr Simpson was to become more involved in the Club in the 1980s when he became a Vice-President and several of his string quartets were performed.



Robert Simpson

There was a welcome resumption

of professional orchestral concerts at the Ritz Cinema but this time the band was the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Rudolf Kempe, then making a name for himself at Covent Garden and elsewhere. This would appear to have been a one-off event as no further orchestral concerts are recorded, at least not with the Club's involvement. (The Club minutes are not extant for this period and so the background to this discontinuation is not documented).

Membership remained fairly static at 134.



Rudolf Kempe

THE 1966/67 SEASON

The Club's 21st birthday season was a somewhat lacklustre affair perhaps but with the usual mix of local talent, including committee members, and of professional input. Local input included youngsters from the Denbigh Road School Brass Band and the Luton Schools Orchestra, while the Vauxhall Male Voice Choir made a return visit after some years. The *New Record Releases* series continued with four programmes all presented by John Thompson (no representatives from the record companies).

There were five Celebrity Concerts again, with Harlequin Ballet and the Albarni String Quartet making return visits. Opera was in the hands of The London Opera Players, a similar group to Opera for All, founded by soprano Elisabeth Parry in 1950. The company was still active up to 2006 when it was forced to close. However it was revived as the New London Opera Players in 2011. For its 1967 Luton show it chose Johann Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*. Two new but distinguished artists in the series were percussionist James Blades and oboist Evelyn Rothwell, who was accompanied by Iris Loveridge. Miss Rothwell was, of course, the wife of Sir John Barbirolli but in her own right was the pre-eminent oboist of her day and it was quite a coup for the Club to be able to engage her. James Blades' lecture-recital on percussion was a classic musical entertainment of its time and must have been experienced at nearly every music club in the land.



Elisabeth Parry



Evelyn Rothwell



James Blades

The lecture-recital as a format was taking over from the straight talk and was more popular with audiences as it involved some element of musical performance as well as being educational. It was also normally very entertaining and relaxing, with plenty of

scope for humorous anecdotes. For the promoter's point of view it was also economical as artist fees for lecture-recitals were a good deal less than for conventional recitals. Many such presentations were based on a particular musical instrument or family of instruments, as with James Blades' show. Audiences were invariably intrigued about the history and development of instruments.

The only straight talk, by a professional at least, was from music critic and journalist Felix Aprahamian on a return visit. His subject was Frederick Delius. It is also interesting to spot the young Ian Brown, then a student at the Royal Academy of Music, in a chamber music trio from the Academy. Ian was later to become very well-known as the stalwart pianist of the Nash Ensemble of London with whom he returned to the Club in years to come.

In the absence of minutes for this period, there are no figures for membership for this or the following ten seasons.

THE 1967/68 SEASON

This season seems to show an enhancement in the quality of artists engaged, perhaps indicating that there was more money available (from the National Federation of Music Societies and from Luton Arts Council). The five Celebrity Concerts included a return visit from Opera for All playing *The Barber of Seville* (which they had performed at the Club in 1960) and from pianist Marlene Fleet who had played at the Club in 1965. New to audiences were three leading ensembles. Musica da Camera was a flute, harp and string trio quintet featuring the 73-year-old Russian harpist Maria Korchinska, who had had such a distinguished career in Russia and England. The Boise Piano Trio comprised violinist Hugh Bean, cellist Eileen Croxford and her husband pianist David Parkhouse.



Boise Piano Trio



Maria Korchinska

With additional players they were to evolve into the very well-known Music Group of London. The last Celebrity Concert featured the distinguished New Zealand mezzo-soprano Honor McKellar with Joan Bucknall on viola and Elizabeth Thomas on piano. With a recital by Hong-Kong-born Enloc Wu the Club resumed a long patronage of the

National Federation of Music Societies' Award for Young Concert Artists, which has enabled so many top-quality young musicians to get started on their careers. A previous winner, John Barstow, played for the Club in 1961 but Miss Wu's recital marked the start of regular engagement of such artists, many of whom subsequently rose to prominence. It is also interesting to see the name of another pianist in an ensemble from the Royal College of Music – the Australian David Helfgott, whose life inspired the Oscar-winning film *Shine* starring Geoffrey Rush in the 1990s. A prodigiously gifted pianist, Helfgott faced increased emotional instability and mental excitability towards the end of his time in London and a brilliant performing career was blighted. His performance in Luton was so impressive that he was invited back the following season, again with some fellow students from the Royal College of Music.

One notable speaker was Thea Musgrave, hailed as 'one of the most respected and exciting composers in the Western world', who came to talk about her music generally and in particular her opera *The Decision*, which was to be given its first performance two weeks later by the New Opera Company at Sadler's wells Theatre.



The young David Helfgott



Thea Musgrave

THE 1968/69 SEASON

The variety of programmes imaginatively assembled on a small budget continued to impress, with a judicious amalgam of established professionals, college students, local amateurs and Committee contributions. There were return visits by people who were becoming firm favourites such as harmonica-player Douglas Tate, Michael Marsh-Edwards, who was now Head of Music at Stopsley High School and no longer on the Club committee, and of course the President Antony Hopkins.

The Celebrity Concerts continued with yet more opera with Elisabeth Parry's Opera Players offering *La bohème* and Chelham Opera, a similar small-scale touring group, new to the Club, presenting *Così fan tutte*. *La bohème* was directed by Peter Gellhorn who returned as pianist with another ensemble in the Celebrity series, the Court Ensemble, which featured the contralto Jean Allister. Peter Gellhorn was a major contributor to the British opera scene at the time, conducting in his long and distinguished career all the leading opera companies, notably the Royal Opera, Covent Garden and Glyndebourne Festival Opera. He was also, for eleven years, Director of the BBC Chorus. He was well known as pianist, composer, lecturer and adjudicator in Britain and overseas.



Peter Gellhorn



Jean Allister



John Carol Case

The baritone John Carol Case was another notable artist to grace the stage at the Theatre, giving a lecture recital on English song from 1600 to the 20th century. He was a stalwart of the British concert scene at this time and was associated with all the great choral societies

and festivals. He became a regular broadcaster on BBC radio and television and made concert appearances in Europe and Canada.

For the first time the Club welcomed the eminent Richards Piano Quartet, comprising violinist Nona Lidell, viola player Jean Stewart, cellist Bernard Richards and pianist Bernard Roberts. This was a high-class chamber group which was to return to the Club more than once. And Bernard Roberts himself returned as solo pianist and in other ensembles over many years and became a great favourite with audiences with his warm and ebullient personality.

But among the musicians who continued to be well-known one finds artists who disappeared from view. One such was Vincent Billington who gave a lecture-recital entitled *The Funny Side of Serious Music*. He worked with all manner of famous conductors and composers as well as show business people and had a world-wide career as a solo pianist. He based himself at Scarborough where he was highly popular and for 12 years was accompanist to violinist Max Jaffa at the Spa. But who remembers him now?



Mary Remnant

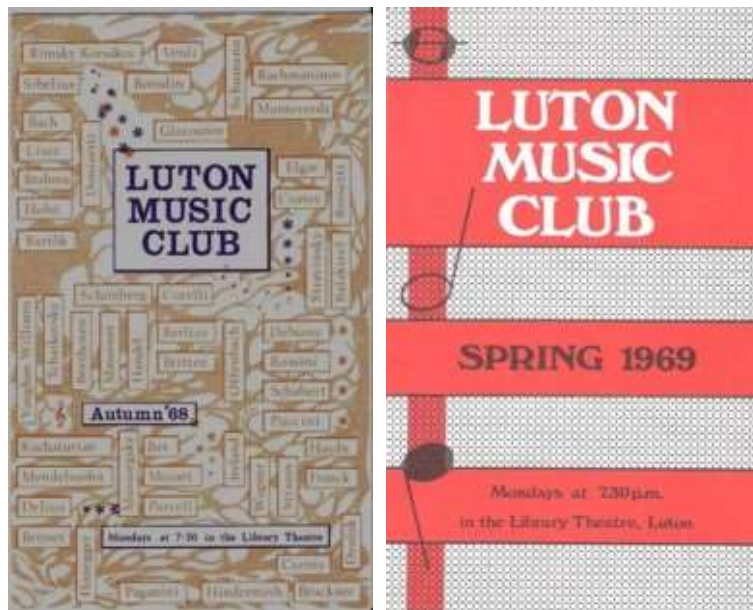


Ruth Gipps

As already noted, lecture recitals were always popular and comparatively inexpensive to put on. Apart from those mentioned above, this season heard a presentation on medieval instruments by Mary Remnant and a talk by Ruth Gipps, the composer and founder and conductor of the Chanticleer

Orchestra. Mary Remnant was very popular on the music club scene at this time and gave her illuminating entertainment – for such it was – to fascinated audiences up and down the country for many years. Ruth Gipps was a highly respected composer/conductor who was also a pianist and oboist. She had a multi-faceted career in all aspects of music. One of her main achievements was the foundation of the British Music Information Centre, now regarded as an invaluable resource for musicians and one which the Club was to make good use of in the 1980s.

The Club's annual brochures had been pretty pedestrian affairs until now but changes were afoot and comparatively sophisticated artwork was introduced into the two leaflets. In addition, simple but effective individual handbills were produced for the Celebrity Concerts.



THE 1969/70 SEASON

This was the first season for which the archive material makes any indication of financial support. Initially, assistance came from two sources: Luton Arts Council (with funds from Luton Council) and the National Federation of Music Societies (with funds from the Arts Council of Great Britain). Funding was to become a highly complex aspect of the Committee's work, but initially financial help was straightforward and fairly automatic. The NFMS funding was based on an assessment of the programme, but followed by a mechanistic calculation. The funding applications had to be submitted to a regional committee which made the decisions. At this time the Club was in the East Midlands region: John Thompson was a member of the regional committee for many years. Joint promotions with the Library for some of the talks also helped, as the Library would find half the fees. There were still around 30 programmes each season although many such as the *New Record Releases* evenings (five this season!) and contributions by Committee members and other locals did not attract a fee. Among these was a talk on Rossini by one Christopher Thomas, of whom more, later!

The season saw return visits from several people including baritone Malcolm Singer, composer Alan Bush, William Glock, BBC Controller of Music, and Alex MacLaren who talked about the history of jazz. It is interesting to note the appearance of Alan Bush, whose music was practically ignored by the musical establishment because of the composer's communist sympathies, in the same season as William Glock, who was one of the most influential members of that very establishment. It was just as well that their talks were six weeks apart!



Owen Brannigan

Among the four Celebrity Concerts was a recital by the celebrated bass Owen Brannigan, known in opera for buffo roles and in concert for a wide range of solo parts in music ranging from Purcell to Tippett. He is best remembered for his roles in Mozart and Britten operas and for his recordings of roles in Britten, Offenbach and Gilbert and Sullivan operas, as well as recordings of English folk songs. He was accompanied by Keith Swallow.

The other Celebrity Concerts included a return visit from pianist Colin Horsley, Welsh National Opera in *Madam Butterfly* (hardly believable!) and a piano trio consisting of violinist Judith Hill, cellist Helen Just and pianist Alan Rowlands, who became much associated with the music of John Ireland.

Among the speakers not already mentioned were John Denison, for many years the General Manager of the Royal Festival Hall and Denys Darlow, the founder and director of the Tilford Bach Festival in Farnham, Surrey.

THE 1970/71 SEASON

Apart from the *New Record Releases* still being presented by John Thompson, there was by this time little or no input from members, most programmes being given by professional musicians and speakers. For the first time the Club produced a single brochure covering the whole season rather than one for each half. It was a plain but stylish publication with plenty of information about the programmes.

Following on from Denys Darlow's talk the previous season, the Tilford Festival Ensemble consisting of flute, violin, cello and harpsichord presented the first of four Celebrity Concerts. Harpsichords were always a problem as the Theatre had no large lift and, unless the instruments could be upended in the small lift, they had to be manhandled up three flights of stairs (and down again, of course!). This was the practice for many years until concerns about insurance and bad backs stopped it and harpsichords were avoided unless they were small enough to go in the lift. The pianist Iris Loveridge, always popular at the Club, returned for a Celebrity Recital as did the young Enloc Wu. The fourth Celebrity Concert was given by the Baccholian Singers of London, a well-known male vocal quintet (Roger Covey-Crump, Ian Partridge, John Huw Davies, Ian Humphris and Brian Etheridge).

The Club continued to patronise the NFMS Award for Young Concert Artists by engaging both the harpist Susan Drake, the 1969 winner, and contralto Anne Collins, the 1970 winner. Both were to make impressive careers.



Baccholian Singers of London

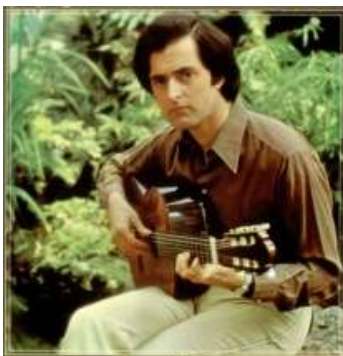


Susan Drake



Anne Collins as Lady Jane in 'Patience'

Guitarists were starting to be popular and the Club began engaging at least one each season. Among the first was the young Julian Byzantine (lovely name! Was it real?), who went on to enjoy an incredibly successful worldwide career playing in almost 80 countries.



Julian Byzantine

One of the most delightful talks was given by Annetta Hoffnung, widow of Gerard Hoffnung who had died in 1959 at the age of 34. Hoffnung is still remembered as a cartoonist of genius, whose



Gerard Hoffnung



Annetta Hoffnung

hilarious rendering of the musical scene had achieved worldwide fame. Annetta Hoffnung had been closely connected with her late husband's work, both in his lifetime and for many years after

his death. She mounted dozens of exhibitions of his original drawings and produced scores of Hoffnung concerts in major cities throughout the world. She was enormously popular on the music club circuit with her talk on Hoffnung, which she illustrated with slides, recordings and films.



Richard Baker

A major new speaker was Richard Baker, who had become a household name as a BBC newsreader and had gone on to presenting other radio and television programmes. He had become especially involved with music as a presenter and narrator/reciter in works such as Walton's *Façade*. He was to return many times in one role or another and became a good friend of the Club.

In the spring of 1971 the Library Theatre closed for building work. As a consequence the Club moved its last four concerts to Quinville House, the 18th century country home in Maulden, near Ampthill, of the international bass-baritone Raimund Herincx and his wife Astra Blair. They had created a small concert hall and founded the Quinville Concerts Trust to raise funds for disabled children. Sir Colin Davis and Sir Charles Groves became joint presidents of the Trust and for 13 years international musicians, singers and actors took part in its concerts, raising money to provide equipment, specialised transport, holidays and leisure activities to children with disabilities. Astra Blair had been a singer herself and was now a concert agent several of whose artists were to appear at the Club later. The Herincxs were to become good friends of the Club for several years and were created vice-presidents in 1972.

The concert hall could only seat around 100 people and the four concerts had to be restricted to members. The Club laid on a coach from Luton for members who required transport. The artists for the four concerts were John Burrows, a repetiteur from Sadler's Wells Opera, the young cellist Camilla de Souza with distinguished pianist Geoffrey Pratley, and student performers from London music colleges. The Club was to return to Quinville House in later seasons.

THE 1971/72 SEASON

The 25th anniversary of the Club was marked on 7 November (a Sunday) by a reception for members and VIPs followed by a recital by the celebrated bass Owen Brannigan with his pianist Keith Swallow. Both reception and recital were held in the main concourse of the Library rather than the theatre. A special printed programme was produced with a potted history of the Club and messages from past presidents Sir Adrian Boult and Norman Del Mar. The current President Antony Hopkins gave an address as did the Mayor of Luton and John Cruft, Music Director of the Arts Council of Great Britain. Brannigan arrived in style in his chauffeur-driven Rolls which was parked right outside the main entrance of the Library and stayed there all evening. Brannigan came ready dressed in white tie and tails and a very theatrical evening cloak. It was most impressive!

Chris Thomas had become Programme Secretary at the previous AGM and was responsible from now until 2013 for the planning of the programmes. This was a new job title as the work had been done until then by the Secretary, Tony Bell, who had been visionary in moving the Club into a much more ambitious scale of programming, seeking to book for certain concerts a much higher calibre of artists than had been thought feasible hitherto. It was Tony Bell who laid the foundations for the Club's future scale of operations although sadly he died at an early age soon after he relinquished his committee role.

Little or no consideration was given to the fact that Chris Thomas knew next to nothing about chamber or instrumental music, his great enthusiasm at the time being opera. Nor of course did he know anything of the concert world generally. He seems to have learnt fast enough and his London-based occupation gave him considerable opportunity to meet concert agents (of which there were many fewer compared with now and which were all based in London). He was also able to go to concerts at the Wigmore Hall and other venues: agents gave out free tickets like confetti to concert promoters.

The Celebrity Concerts continued with a recital by the young Brazilian guitarist Turibio Santos, a return visit from the Albeni String Quartet, the Welsh National Opera in *The Barber of Seville* and a recital by Peter Wallfisch, replacing Alicia Schachter who was unable to appear. Peter was, of course, the father of the fine cellist Raphael Wallfisch, who played at the Club later.



Turibio Santos



Raphael and Peter Wallfisch

Around this time the Club started to receive welcome support in kind from Luton's Parks Department which provided impressive floral displays for the stage on selected dates stipulated by the Club. This support continued for several years. The displays were

always a delight and much appreciated by artists and audiences alike. A similar kind of support was provided by the Luton Co-Op which was just across the street from the Library. For John Thompson's regular series of *New Record Releases* the Co-Op provided a roomful of furniture so that the stage looked like an ordinary sitting room with sofa, armchairs, sideboard, coffee table and standard lamp. John brought in his own excellent stereo equipment. At this time John was working for EMI and his contacts in the recording business enabled him to bring leading record producers to present the programmes. This season there were contributions from Deutsche Grammophon, EMI, Decca and CBS.

Following on from the Club's short evacuation to Quinville House at the end of the previous season, Raimund Herinx was invited to give a recital with his pianist Janet Edwards. Vocal music of a lighter kind was provided by singer/guitarist Leonard Pearcey, well-known at the time, with his

Songs of Love and Lust and by the world famous folk duo Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl. Further light-hearted but instructive entertainment was provided by the very eminent horn-player Barry Tuckwell who presented a lecture-recital on his instrument.



The final event of the season was a talk by the tenor Peter Pears entitled *Words and Music*. This was a significant event for the following reason: a couple of days before Pears' visit the Club was told that he would be accompanied by Benjamin Britten as they were on

Peggy Seeger & Ewan MacColl Barry Tuckwell

their way back to Aldeburgh from London. Pears was amazingly nervous before the talk. Afterwards, they were offered a drink before they departed but, in the absence of facilities in the theatre, had to be entertained in a smoky pub across the road. As St George's Square was then the town's bus depot the pub was full of bus drivers and conductors. It was a bizarre experience for John Thompson and Chris Thomas to entertain such eminent musicians to half a pint of bitter in such incongruous surroundings! It was this visit which prompted the Club to introduce an artists' autograph/visitors book which has been a tradition ever since.



Peter Pears and Benjamin Britten

THE 1972/73 SEASON

Building work in the Library Theatre prevented the Club from starting its season in its usual venue and so until 4 December concerts were held mostly at St Mary's Church Hall. Because of this inconvenience the season started later than usual (9 October). The building work was to install two much needed additional dressing rooms, a shower room and another toilet, and a scenery dock, which would also provide a storage space for the piano.

Around this time the Club decided to mount an exhibition at the start of each season with photographs of the artists taking part and other material. This was displayed in the Library for six weeks or so before and after the date of the first concert. It took a lot of work but attracted quite a lot of public attention. It continued for some years until the volunteers dried up!

Tony Bell's visionary artistic aspirations secured the services of artists like the King's Singers, then at the height of their popularity, the New London Wind Ensemble and the New London Soloists Ensemble, an 11-piece group playing Vivaldi, Boyce and Mozart. These last two groups comprised leading instrumentalists at the top of their game. But his biggest coup was to book a recital by Alfred Brendel, one of the greatest pianists of the time. Brendel's recital had to be on a Sunday because of his limited availability and was put on in what was then the Esso Motor Hotel in Dunstable Road (now the Chiltern Hotel) as the Theatre was unavailable and in any case he insisted on having a specially-selected Steinway brought from London, which could not be got into the Theatre easily. Like Pears, Brendel was noticeably nervous before going on. Just before doing so he warmed up on an old honky-tonk piano in the hotel. He was such a warm and gentle but quite shy man.

Tony Bell was also farsighted enough to identify musicians who were clearly going places and suggested that the Club booked the 20-year-old Hungarian pianist Zoltán Kocsis, who dazzled the audience with his virtuosity in music by Beethoven, Liszt and Bartók. It was this skill at recognizing artists of the future that Chris Thomas gradually learned which enabled the Club to engage some of the finest musicians before they became famous – and expensive.



Alfred Brendel



Zoltán Kocsis

A further, somewhat daring, innovation was to have two opera performances by Opera for All on two consecutive evenings and of two different operas – on the Monday they presented Gounod's *Faust* and on the Tuesday gave a rare outing to Nicolai's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. *Faust* was

given in a production by the London Opera Centre. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was presented in association with Luton Arts Council, which meant that they contributed to the fee.



Juan Martin



Anthony Peebles

Among other artists were the flamenco guitarist Juan Martin, the pianist Anthony Peebles and Peter Hurford, organist and Master of the Music at St Alban's Abbey. His lecture-recital was in St

Mary's Parish Church as was the Christmas music concert with mezzo Delia Jones, young oboist Gary Roberts, and the Parish Church Choir conducted by Clive Simmonds. This had become a regular traditional element in the programme.

This is the first season for which attendance statistics have survived: the average for the season was 173, reaching 300 for Alfred Brendel at the hotel, and between 200 and 257 for seven of the concerts (the Theatre at that time had 257 seats). Happy days!

In May 1973 the Club hosted the Annual General Meeting of the National Federation of Music Societies East Midlands Region, an event engineered by John Thompson who was still on the Regional Committee. After the short business meeting there was a concert by NFMS young artists followed by a buffet lunch.

The brochure's design continued to change from season to season. It would soon settle down!



THE 1973/74 SEASON

This season was the first truly international season with artists from Brazil, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Japan and Canada. It was also the first of four successive seasons in which a nationalistic theme was introduced. This was done as a positive means of widening the range of music heard. Music from Czechoslovakia (as it then was) was the choice for the first of these seasons, although the amount of such repertoire was only a sprinkling, not an inundation. These programmes included a wholly Czech recital by the UK-based pianist Eva Bernáthová, a talk on Janáček by David Lloyd-Jones, then a conductor at Sadler's Wells Theatre where several of the composer's operas had received their UK premieres, the Czech Philharmonic Quartet plus pieces in a few other concerts. The Quartet concert had a somewhat alarming consequence: as one of the promoters on the Quartet's UK tour, Chris Thomas and his wife were invited to a reception and concert at the Czech Embassy, along with the concert agent. Some time later Chris was summoned from his desk at the Bank of England to face some questioning by some gentlemen from – it turned out – MI5. Czechoslovakia was then, of course, behind the Iron Curtain and MI5 took no chances when it came to personal contacts. Chris was able to reassure the MI5 agents that he had only really talked to the concert agent and his wife at the reception. Nevertheless, it was a somewhat unnerving experience!



David Lloyd-Jones



Sergio and Eduardo Abreu

The Czech Philharmonic Quartet's concert was one of the season's five Celebrity Concerts which also included the young Brazilian guitar sensations, the brothers Sergio and Eduardo Abreu; the Bulgarian violinist Stoika Milanova, who had won the prestigious Carl Flesch Violin Competition, with her pianist sister, Dora; the Yugoslav pianist Dubravka Tomsic; and the wonderful Nash Ensemble of London. But this 'celebrity' line-up far from outshone other stunning artists: another Carl Flesch winner (1972), the Hungarian viola player Csába Erdélyi with pianist Clifford Benson, and solo pianists Reiko



Dubravka Tomsic



Csába Erdélyi

Matsuzaki, winner of the 1971 Liszt-Bartók Piano Competition, and Philip Fowke, winner of the 1973 NFMS Young Artists Award. Choosing winners from various competitions was a simple way of picking the best artists at a time in their careers when they were relatively inexpensive!

This season the Club established a relationship with the Rural Music Schools Association (which later became the Benslow Music Trust) a nationwide organisation aimed at nurturing the talents of adult amateur musicians, and presented the first of several concerts in aid of the financially strapped



Sybil Eaton

organisation at Hitchin. The 'deal' was that the RMSA would find top-line artists to play at the Club for no fee, and the Club in turn would hand over an average fee as a donation. The Club got a top quality concert for a modest outlay, and the RMSA got a bit of money towards its deficit. The RMSA's 'fixer' who prevailed on artists to play for nothing was a redoubtable elderly lady called Sybil Eaton, who had been a fine violinist in her youth and an ardent supporter of the RMSA. The first concert was given by the Music Group of London which had played for the Club once before as the Boise Piano Trio. Miss Eaton came to all these charity concerts at the Club and from the stage she dramatically extolled the virtues of the RMSA, the musicians and the Club itself. She had been a

distinguished player in her time and Gerald Finzi had written his violin concerto for her in 1928. A room is named after her at Benslow.



Stephen Dodgson

The season also saw the Club's first association with Stephen Dodgson, who was to become such a long and stalwart supporter of its activities. The Athenaeum Trio gave the first performance of Stephen's Trio for oboe, bassoon and piano. Stephen was later to become a vice-president of the Club and, with his wife Jane Clark, a distinguished harpsichordist, was to be a regular visitor and enthusiastic supporter of the Club until his death in 2013.

One concert which gave especial headaches was a words-and-music programme which was to have been given by the lutenist-singer Martin Best with the well-known actor Andrew Cruickshank (of *Dr Finlay's Casebook* fame) and his daughter Marty. A couple of weeks before the concert Marty Cruickshank pulled out because the play she was in had its run extended in New York.

On the very day of the concert Andrew Cruickshank withdrew on

account of illness. Chris Thomas was offered Martin Best on his own but declined, preferring to try and retain the words-and-music content that the audience was expecting. This concert was to be given at the Esso Motor Hotel on a Sunday. A telephone call to the tenor Wynford Evans secured the services of him and his duo partner lutenist/guitarist Carl Shavitz. A call for help to Vice-President Raimund Herincx suggested the actor and local resident Graham Crowden as a reader. He later became a well-known face on television in the comedy series *Waiting for God* with Stephanie Cole. He, too, agreed. Chris collected Mr Crowden at his home in Steppingley, where he was waiting with a small collection of books and two large whiskies, and took him to the hotel to meet the other two artists. The three performers retreated to a room where they worked out a programme. They performed as though they had been preparing for weeks. True professionalism!



Graham Crowden



'Songs of Town and Country'

Three artists who were to play a big part in programmes in the 1970s appeared for the first time: the vivacious soprano Penelope Mackay, the baritone Robert Carpenter Turner and their pianist Kenneth Barclay. They gave a programme first presented at the Purcell Room entitled *Songs of Town and Country* – all British works by Purcell, Ivor Gurney, Peter Warlock, Nicholas Maw, Walton, Vaughan Williams and so on. The artists were to become firm favourites with audiences in the next decade.

Opera still featured in the season, but amazingly the Club decided to mount three productions one after the other on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. The Opera Players gave *Don Pasquale* and Chelham Opera presented *La traviata* and then *Così fan tutte*. It was a bit of a mistake as audiences could not easily take such an opera feast and had to choose which to attend. Consequently numbers were 101 on Monday, 138 on Tuesday and a miserable 75 on the Wednesday. An even bigger mistake was a collaboration with the Society for the Promotion of New Music (anything to get another organisation to help with paying for concerts!). The SPNM certainly did assist financially but insisted, as well they might, on having three new pieces in the programmes (by David Carhart, Christopher Bochmann and John Owen), all of which seemed unintelligible to the audience. The concert was given by the Georgian String Quartet who also played a Haydn quartet and a less than jolly number by Lutoslawski. All three composers were present. 128 people suffered what proved to be a horribly embarrassing evening.

A new style brochure was introduced based on the Royal Festival Hall's South Bank Diary. Designed as a narrow booklet, it also included details of other musical events in the town and was called *Music in Luton*. This was an altruistic initiative on the Club's part and the publicity for the other organisations was provided entirely free. This style brochure and free publicity continued until 1980.

There were close on 200 members and the average attendance was 161, with six concerts exceeding 190. For the first time the Club received funding from Eastern Arts Association, in addition to that given by the NFMS and Luton Arts Council.



THE 1974/75 SEASON

The nationalistic theme this season was French music, suggested by the 50th anniversary of Fauré's death and the centenary of the birth of Ravel. The focus was a little stronger than it had been with the Czech series, with French music in nine programmes. Marking composers' anniversaries and birthdays was to be a regular feature of the programmes from now on. The series included the soprano Wendy Eathorne singing songs by Chausson and Duparc, a lecture recital by Christopher Hogwood on French harpsichord music, and an almost all-French song recital by NFMS Award winner Peter Knapp in music by Chabrier, Ravel, Hahn, Fauré and Poulenc.

Another anniversary marked this season was the 50th year since the death of Puccini. This was celebrated in a Covent Garden ensemble of three singers and one of their chief répétiteurs. Opera was also represented in the season by Opera for All, returning to perform *The Marriage of Figaro*.



Stephen Bishop



Christopher Hogwood

A special initiative was the joint promotion with Dunstable Music Club of a recital by the eminent pianist Stephen Bishop (later to call himself Stephen Bishop-Kovacevic and later still Stephen Kovacevic). The recital, held at the Queensway Hall - the appalling acoustics of which did nothing to help - was intended to boost interest in the activities of both music clubs, but it did little to do so, certainly not for Dunstable Music Club which eventually folded. The concert drew an audience of 390 people, though.



Wendy Eathorne



Jack Brymer

Wendy Eathorne was one of the usual five performers taking part in the celebrity Concerts. The others included a sensational ensemble from America, the Cleveland Quartet, which gave one of the most memorable concerts the Club had heard, the London Gabrieli Brass Ensemble, the Wissema Quartet with top clarinettist Jack Brymer, and the London Virtuosi, a leading wind and strings group including oboist Anthony Camden, violinist John Georgiadis, the viola player Brian Hawkins and cellist Douglas Cummings. There were properly five players in the group but the Club's financial constraints meant that it could only afford four.

Chris Thomas decided that the flautist could be dispensed with easily enough. His name was James Galway. Whoops!



The London Virtuosi
(without Galway!)



Kathryn Stott

It was always satisfying to pick artists who were later to become among the finest in the land. Among such players this season were violinist Elisabeth Perry and her pianist Yitkin Seow who both went on to starry careers. The Club also approached the Yehudi Menuhin School for a group of students and was rewarded with a piano quintet comprising violinists Krystyna Osostowicz and Colin Twigg, the viola player Garfield Jackson, cellist Susan Dorey and pianist



Moray Welsh

Kathryn Stott. These too were to develop brilliant careers and to return to the Club in various ensembles over the next few years. The young cellist Moray Welsh, who gave a recital with pianist John York, was also at the start of a very distinguished career.

One object of programme planning was to introduce items from the lighter end of the 'classical' musical spectrum. There were two such entertainments this season. First, a return visit from Penelope Mackay, Robert Carpenter Turner and Ken Barclay, joined by mezzo Sylvia Eaves, in an evening of Victorian and Edwardian parlour songs. The foursome called themselves The Parlour Quartet and presented the show in costume with a bit of furniture and props and semi-acted as if it were a genteel private soirée. They were to return by popular demand. The second show was The City Waites, featuring Lucie, Joe and Roddy Skeaping and Doug Wootton in a costumed entertainment of broadside ballads and popular, often bawdy, songs of 16th and 17th century England. This went down very well with the audience and the Waites came back quite a few times.



The City Waites

The regular Christmas programmes at the Parish Church stopped and the Club went to Raimund and Astra Herincx's Quinville House for its pre-Christmas concert by students from the Royal Academy of Music. The committee provided a light supper for the audience of 110 and Ray, who was a wine buff, provided a discerning selection of wine at cost price.

There was still no bar in the Theatre but by this time the Strathmore Hotel had been built and the Club began to offer the musicians hospitality there after concerts. Average audience was a startling 194 with nine concerts exceeding 200.

THE 1975/76 SEASON

Another fully international season was presented with artists from Switzerland (the Lucerne Piano Trio), Germany (pianist Klaus Zoll), Brazil (guitarist Turibio Santos in a return visit), Argentina (pianist Sylvia Kersenbaum), Yugoslavia (cellist Valter Despalj) and Belgium (the distinguished pianist Albert Ferber). Some of these artists took part in the season's nationalistic theme of Russian music, which also included the Fitzwilliam and Rasumovsky string quartets, the soprano Jacqueline Delman, a well-known face on BBC Television at the time and a star of the Royal Opera Stockholm, and a marvellous new mixed ensemble called Capricorn among whose members were violinist Monica Huggett and pianist Julian Dawson-Lyell. The ensemble would return a good few times in the coming seasons. Julian later changed his surname to Jacobson.



Sylvia Kersenbaum



Valter Despalj



Albert Ferber

Another concert in aid of the Rural Music Schools Association at Hitchin was arranged, given this time by the Richards Piano Quartet which had been to the Club before. Once again the exuberant Sybil Eaton came to extol the virtues of everything and everybody.

A new development was participation in the Contemporary Music Network, founded by Annette Morreau in 1971 and funded by the Arts Council of Great Britain. The network's aim was to promote new music in selected centres around the country. Promoters were supported financially by the Arts Council.

Around eight artists/programmes were offered each season, most of them were what an average audience would call 'difficult'. But there was usually one programme which was reasonably acceptable for an adventurous music club – like Luton. Few, if any, other clubs sought to participate. The Club continued to make use of the network for some years until all the programmes became too way out. The first concert the Club took was an ensemble of 14 players called Contrapuncti, directed by Michael Lankester. The programme included Stravinsky's Septet, Ravel's Introduction and Allegro, Janáček's *Capriccio* for piano and ensemble (with Ian Brown as soloist), and, as the only really modern piece, Gordon Crosse's *Ariadne*, a concertino for oboe and ensemble in which the soloist was Sarah Francis. There was nothing to frighten anyone in this piece! Gordon Crosse came to hear the work.

Lighter fare in the form of ragtime music was provided by a highly entertaining group called the New Excelsior Talking Machine and led by Americans James Tyler and George Weigand on



Gordon Crosse



Sarah Francis



New Excelsior Talking Machine

banjos. Sadly the group did not last long and shortly disappeared from view. And still on the lighter front, mezzo-soprano Susan Lees and guitarist Michael Lewin gave an informal programme of songs and guitar and lute solos from the 16th century to the present day. Michael also appeared with the Praetorius Consort, which offered music from medieval France, Italian Carnival songs and

dances and music from Tudor England. Early music was to be featured rather more in future seasons.

The Christmas event was again given at Quinville House, this time with the 1975 winner of the NFMS Young Artist Award, soprano Kathleen Livingstone, and her tenor husband Neil Mackie, with



Kathleen Livingstone Neil Mackie

Levon Chilingirian

John Blakely at the piano, and a young guitarist Nicholas Hooper to provide non-vocal interludes. Once again a supper was provided by the committee for the lucky 110 who booked their seats early. The NFMS Award was always

an easy way of picking winners, but there were other competitions which provided ideas: two such were the BBC Beethoven Competition and the Munich International Competition, both for violinists. Levon Chilingirian won these in 1969 and 1971 respectively with pianist Clifford Benson and they enthralled a large audience in Beethoven, Elgar and Brahms.

A prestigious event was a recording of an edition of the BBC music quiz *Music in Question* devised and chaired by the Club President Antony Hopkins. The panellists were clarinettist Gervase de Peyer, pianist Gwenneth Pryor and Vice-president Raimund Herincx. The programme was broadcast later.

The final concert was a last minute addition – a piano recital by Yitkin Seow who offered his services in aid of the British Hospital for Vietnam.

The average audience was 215 with no less than 18 programmes achieving over 200. Those were the days!

INTERLUDE 1: THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT

This celebratory event was on such a scale that it deserves a 'chapter' to itself in this history.

The origin of the concert was an idea from Chris Thomas who sketched out a draft programme of short and light items to be performed by a number of artists with whom the Club had, for the most part, formed close connections. It was then thought that the entertainment should be properly produced as a 'show' in which one musical item more or less melted into another. The man to oversee all this was Douglas Craig, who had been to the Club on several occasions and was also a wartime colleague of John Thompson at Bletchley Park. At this time he was Director of Sadler's Wells Opera and accordingly, John and Chris went to see him there but before long found themselves with Douglas in Frederick's Restaurant in Camden Passage in Islington. There, over an extended lunch – or was it two? - the programme was modified and other details worked out.

The artists were to be the singers Raimund Herincx, Penelope Mackay, Robert Carpenter Turner, Angela Vernon Bates and Bruce Lochtie, with Jürgen Hess violin, husband and wife duo Lucy Cartledge flute and Nicholas Hooper guitar, and Kenneth Barclay piano. Not surprisingly, Antony Hopkins was to be the compere. Fees were minimal as they all agreed to take part for the love of Luton – or the Music Club, at least.



Some of the cast

The final programme included Glazunov's *Meditation* for violin and piano, Wilfred Sanderson's *In a Garden of Roses*, Vaughan Williams' *Linden Lea*, Dibdin's *Lady's Diary*, Gelli's Divertimento for flute and guitar, Tárrega's *Capriccio arabe* for guitar, Mozart's *Lá ci darem la mano* from *Don Giovanni*, Schubert's D major violin sonatina, Tchaikovsky's *None but the lonely heart*, Offenbach's *Two gendarmes*, Arditi's *Il bacio*, Kreisler's *Liebeslied* and *Schön Rosmarin*, Biccialdi's *Carnival of Venice* and the Champagne aria and the *Brüder mein* ensemble from Johann Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*.



'Lá ci darem la mano'



'The Two Gendarmes'

The only rehearsal for the show was on the afternoon of the performance (18 October 1976). Before that the stage had to be set. The idea was to create a garden or at least a terrace in a garden. Luton Parks Department provided masses of greenery and floristry of every kind while garden furniture was supplied free by Oakley Garden Centre in Woburn Sands. The stage picture was captivating.

Apart from the regular audience of members, there were a number of guests. The audience was invited to dress up for the occasion and many did so, to turn the evening into a truly Gala Celebration of what everyone agreed to have been a milestone in the history of a very special music society



The show in rehearsal



Concert agent Helen Jennings with Programme Secretary Chris Thomas (with hair)

There are more photographs in the Club's archive

THE 1976/77 SEASON

The 30th anniversary Gala did not eclipse the rest of the season by any means and some impressive and well-known talents graced the Library Theatre stage. The last of the nationalistic themes was Spanish music. It was felt that the idea had run its course. The Spanish flavour was suggested by the centenary of the birth of Manuel de Falla whose music appeared in five concerts. Planning such series always meant not only seeking artists who were likely to have appropriate pieces in their repertoire already but also occasionally persuading artists to specially prepare such pieces. Musicians were invariably very accommodating and seemed to welcome such a specific interest in repertoire. It was, it seems, not all that common amongst music clubs!



Trevor Pinnock



Colin Carr



Enrique Perez de Guzman

Among the Spanish delights were harpsichordist Trevor Pinnock's ensemble The English Concert with a programme including excerpts from *zarzuelas* (Spanish operettas) and keyboard music by Scarlatti and Soler; the brilliant young cellist Colin Carr with pianist Kathryn Stott playing

Falla's *Suite populaire espagnole*; John Mills presenting *Four Centuries of the Spanish Guitar*; violinist Howard Davis of the Alberni Quartet with his harpsichordist wife Virginia Black playing Albéniz, Sarasate, Falla and Soler; and an actual authentic Spaniard, the charismatic Enrique Perez de Guzman.



Stephen Dodgson



Trio La Serata

Spanish songs were also included in a concert by the prestigious group Trio La Serata, which included mezzo-soprano Susan Daniel, top clarinettist Gervase de Peyer and pianist Gwenneth Pryor.



The score

These last two had appeared at the Club already in the BBC recording of *Music in Question*. But this concert was more significant still as it included the first performance of the Club's first commissioned work, marking the 30th anniversary. The composer was Stephen Dodgson and the work was called *Gipsy Songs*, being settings of verses by Ben Jonson from *The Gipsies Metamorphosed* (1621). There were four songs in the group which was funded by the Arts Council of Great Britain and was especially written for this Trio. The Club was later to arrange two further performances of the songs. A copy of the original score is in the Club archive.

Not content with the one theme, the Club marked the 150th anniversary of Beethoven's death with six consecutive programmes at the end of the season. Two were all-Beethoven programmes – The Music Party (tenor Nigel Rogers with violin, cello and fortepiano) and the Duke Piano Trio, while three had a single work in each. Among these were the Chilingirian Quartet and Raimund Herincx

singing *An die ferne Geliebte*. The sixth programme was Hans Conrad Fischer famous film of the composer's life.

An anniversary of a different sort was the Queen's Silver Jubilee which was marked by a gala Victorian evening presented in costume by a group called the English Drawing Room (voices, flute and piano) in a sequence of music recalling Queen Victoria's jubilees. Period chairs were provided by Club members and parlour palms by the Parks Department.

The Christmas event was once again at the Herincx's Quinville House at Maulden. This time it was, almost inevitably, *A Spanish Christmas at Quinville* and featured soprano Jacquelyn Fugelle with her somewhat elderly pianist husband, along with Finnish guitarist Seppo Siirala.

The Club again took advantage of the Arts Council's Contemporary Music Network by taking a concert by the Tuckwell Wind Quintet and pianist Imogen Cooper. Barry Tuckwell's quintet were all leading brass players and, of course, Cooper was one of the finest pianists in the land at that time, and so this was a truly prestige event for the Club. The programme included the Ten Pieces by Ligeti, Mozart's Quintet for piano and wind and the Wind Quintet by Schoenberg. Other leading performers this season were Spanish harpist Marisa Robles who was featured in a *New Record Releases* programme, and the Medici Quartet which was to become one of the most admired string quartets of the day.



Imogen Cooper



Marisa Robles

The average attendance was 213, with 18 programmes attracting over 200 people. There were three full houses (257). The lowest attendance was a mere 163! Membership was 302 – 45 more than the theatre could accommodate!

Funding was still mainly the NFMS, Luton Arts Council and Eastern Arts Association, although for the first time Bedfordshire County Council offered welcome financial support. Luton Borough Council also contributed towards the cost of the *Music in Luton* brochure.

In April John Thompson and Chris Thomas attended the national conference of the NFMS which was held at Worcester, the first time that the Club had sent representatives to the event. It was to be a regular annual trip for both of them and it wasn't long before they were invited to give a talk on running a successful music club, which they repeated several times in the coming years at various conferences. The annual conference was also an excellent forum for meeting concert agents and other music clubs. Comparing notes with and picking up ideas from other promoters was very useful and a number of the Club's innovations were adopted as a result of chats with other clubs. The networking had begun!

THE 1977/78 SEASON

There was no theme this season, but plenty of well-known names graced the programme. For a start there were three brilliant young pianists: the young Belgian star Evelyn Brancart, who has not been heard of much here since she moved to the US in 1980; Howard Shelley, who has since had



Howard Shelley



Fiona Kimm

a wide-ranging worldwide career and has been much associated with the music of Rachmaninov; and Christian Blackshaw, who also enjoyed international renown for many years. Another popular pianist was David Owen Norris who accompanied the young mezzo Fiona Kimm, who had won second prize in the 1977 Kathleen Ferrier Competition and who was something of a protégé of Raimund Herincx, who saw her as the next Janet Baker. She did not become quite so famous, however!



David Owen Norris

There was another concert in aid of the Rural Music Schools Association in Hitchin, this time given by the Allegri Quartet, then at the height of its fame and once again Sybil Eaton had leant upon them to play for nothing in support of the Association.

The Club then began a relationship with the Austrian Cultural Institute in London, which aimed to promote Austrian arts and culture in Britain. The Director at the time was Dr Bernhard Stillfried, a genial man who was keen to bring Austrian musicians to the UK to play for expenses-only fees. Always on the lookout for inexpensive but quality concerts, Chris Thomas took

advantage of this and became a close associate of Dr Stillfried, arranging one concert a year with the Institute. The first was a wind quintet which went by the wonderful name of the Niederösterreichisches Bläserquintett (or, more prosaically, the Lower Austria Woodwind Quintet). For marketing purposes, though, the Club billed it by its German name as it sounded so much more exotic!

Wind music was also featured in a trio concert with the Camden brothers, oboist Anthony and bassoonist Kerry, sons of bassoonist Archie Camden who had visited the Club in 1947, with pianist Ian Lake. Also contributing to the season's windiness was oboist George Caird, a winner of the NFMS 1976 Award for Young Concert Artists, with pianist John Blakely, both of whom were to play for the Club a good deal in the future.

The offering from the Contemporary Music Network was a big mistake on our part. It was given by the modern music group Matrix with soprano Jane Manning and an instrumental ensemble of clarinets and saxophones, piano and percussion. The programme was unashamedly modern – music by Tippett, Oliver Knussen, Harrison Birtwistle, Avril Anderson and Luigi Dallapiccola. Jane Manning was quite a character and almost religious in her devotion to some pretty indigestible music. She could not understand why we could not share her enthusiasm. A similar mistake was made two months later with a programme by a group called Chrome which also featured a soprano and an equally bizarre array of instruments. Despite a piece by Mozart and some songs by Kurt Weill, the remainder of the programme did nothing to dispel the poor image of contemporary music among the Club audience.



Jane Manning



John & Susan Georgiadis

Calm was restored by John and Susan Georgiadis in a programme of gipsy and virtuoso music for violin and piano and by the soothing baroque sounds of Christopher Hogwood's Academy of Ancient Music. The latter was one of four concerts sponsored by National Westminster Bank, the first time the Club had secured commercial sponsorship. The other three concerts were the sensational New Budapest String Quartet, the Austrian guitarist Leo Witoszynskij, and an entertainment in costume featuring dances of Renaissance Europe performed by the Companie of Dansers and an instrumental ensemble called Quintain.



Jennie Linden

Christmas at Quinville had stopped for some reason but the Herincxs still remained involved with the Club. It was through them that a St Valentine's Eve entertainment of words and music was arranged featuring the actress Jennie Linden and pianist Janet Edwards. Miss Linden lived locally and was very well-known at the time particularly for her starring role in *Women in Love* with Glenda Jackson, Alan Bates and Oliver Reed. As has often been the case, words-and-music programmes are not that popular, despite the presence of well-known actors. This programme only brought in 131 people, quite low at the time.

Among other delights were the Coull String Quartet which had been founded at the Royal Academy of Music in 1974 and in 1977 had been appointed Quartet-in-Residence at Warwick University, a position they held for many years. They returned to the Club more than once and, at the time of writing, are still going strong – and with the same two original violinists. Another stalwart ensemble was the Alberni Quartet which came back to play a quintet and sextet with a second viola, Roger Best, and a second cello, Moray Welsh, who had already played this season with Roger Vignoles. The Club was to see a good deal more of the latter, who was to become one of the leading accompanists in Britain.

The NFMS continued to be impressed by the Club's activities and increased its funding slightly, at the same time recommending the high standards and adventurous programme. John Thompson and Chris Thomas attended the NFMS annual national conference at Southampton in April.

There were 314 members this season but the average attendance dropped slightly to 181, with only five programmes exceeding 200, although several more approached that figure. It was still a comfortable and reassuring result – despite Miss Manning's efforts.

THE 1978/79 SEASON

The main feature was a Schubert series, marking the 150th anniversary of the composer's death. This was an extensive tribute with Schubert's music being heard in twelve programmes, five of which were entirely devoted to him. Chief among these was The Songmakers' Almanac, the brainchild of Graham Johnson, who brought together some of the finest singers of the day in cleverly devised programmes.



Felicity Lott



Heinz Medjimorec



Delmé Quartet

The programme for Luton was *A Birthday Schubertiad*, which was scheduled two days before the composer's actual birthday. Johnson's singers were Felicity Lott and Richard Jackson. Another all-Schubert programme was given by the piano duet team Heinz Medjimorec and Hans Petermandl, who

came under the auspices of the Austrian Cultural Institute. And to end the season the Delmé Quartet on the first of several visits to the Club played the *Death and Maiden Quartet*, the *Quartettsatz* and, with cellist Charles Tunnell, the sublime String Quintet.



Craig Sheppard

Among the pianists were the eminent American Craig Sheppard who gave an all-Brahms programme, Paul Coker, winner of the 1978 NFMS Young Artist Award, and the 15-year-old prodigy Alison Baker. The 19-year-old Paul Coker went on to be a finalist in the first BBC Young Musician of the Year Competition in 1978. He was a pupil of Brendel and although he had a splendid career accompanying Menuhin all over the world, as well as other leading instrumentalists such as Nigel Kennedy, Steven Isserlis and Joshua Bell, he seems to have disappeared from general view. This was partly because he settled in Switzerland. Alison Baker was an infant prodigy. The youngest ever student at the

Royal Academy of Music, aged nine, she was recommended to the Club by Antony Hopkins, the President. She too disappeared from the musical scene, moving to Sweden and sadly dying there at the age of 45. Both she and Paul Coker included Schubert in their programmes.



Raphael Wallfisch

Another anniversary was the centenary of the birth of Frank Bridge. This was marked in a recital by top cellist Raphael Wallfisch and pianist Richard Markham. They played the Cello Sonata and three pieces for solo piano. The Club was to feature the music of Bridge quite often in the succeeding seasons.

Despite the 'difficult' programme from the Contemporary Music Network the previous season, another concert was taken from the Arts Council's offers. This was the irresistible offer of the world-famous Lindsay Quartet, playing a reasonably 'safe' programme which

included Janáček's second quartet *Intimate Letters*, Hugo Wolf's *Italian Serenade* and Berg's *Lyric Suite*.

Music at the other end of the spectrum was now on offer from the Early Music Network and the Club took the opportunity to engage the Landini Consort in a programme of English and Italian music of the 14th and 16th centuries, and also a group called L'École d'Orphée in a programme with the unwieldy title *Music by Visitors and Immigrants to 17th and 18th Century London*. It starred the delightful soprano Catherine Bott, with Stephen Preston on flute, Jennifer Ward-Clarke on cello and John Toll on harpsichord. The Early Music Network was run by the Arts Council of Great



Catherine Bott

Britain and was a great help to promoters in sorting the wheat from the chaff in the early music scene, which had many groups characterised more by their enthusiasm than by their musical skills or stage presentation. The Club was to become a regular supporter of the Network as a result of which Chris Thomas was invited in 1984 to be an adjudicator for one of the EMN competitions. More early music was heard from La Petite Musique, a soprano and bass viol duo offering music from the Court of Louis XIV at Versailles, and from the London Baroque Soloists.



Rosemary Furniss

The Schubert series also included concerts by the Bochmann Quartet, destined to become one of Britain's finest string ensembles, the Tilford Ensemble on a return visit and playing the *Trout* Quintet, and violinist Rosemary Furniss with Kathryn Stott once again on piano.

Despite Jane Manning's less-than-appealing Matrix concert the previous season, she was asked back in a somewhat more approachable programme with pianist-composer Richard Rodney Bennett, visiting Luton in the first of several appearances. Their programme did include some contemporary music in the form of Elizabeth

Maconchy's *Sun, Moon and Stars* and Bennett's own *A Garland for Marjorie Fleming*, but there were also songs by Brahms, Bridge, Peter Warlock, Charles Ives, Schoenberg (cabaret songs) and lighter numbers by Jerome Kern, Ivor Novello and Noel Coward.



Richard Rodney Bennett



Elizabeth Maconchy

There was more vocal music in the concert by soprano Lynda Russell and mezzo Fiona Kimm, on a return visit. They were the winner and runner-up respectively of the 1977 Kathleen Ferrier Award. Their programme of Purcell, Finzi, Britten, Rossini, Verdi, Puccini, Richard Strauss, Bizet and Brahms drew an impressive 180 people.

In fact the audience numbers continued to hold up generally with an average of 174 and six concerts exceeding the 200 mark. There were 305 members, a very slight drop from the previous season.

INTERLUDE 2: TIPPETT'S 75TH BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE

Sir Michael Tippett's 75th birthday fell in January 1980. It was agreed to mark this with a tribute to the composer in the form of a series of eight programmes in which, for the most part, just one of Tippett's small scale works would be included. As his output of chamber and instrumental music was not large, this plan would enable a fairly complete series to be mounted. The series won a Special Subsidy from the NFMS in the first year of that award being introduced. The Club was the only music club to apply, unsurprisingly as such enterprise was not easily demonstrable by clubs presenting just six concerts a season, which was the normal practice. The award amounted to over 70% of the artist fees for the series. And this was in addition to the normal funding which the NFMS provided.



Sir Michael Tippett

The series included the three piano sonatas, the first being played by Martin Hughes and the second and third by Stephen Savage. At the time of planning, the three string quartets were to be played by the Dartington, Coull and Strange quartets, but it was discovered quite late on that Tippett had in fact composed a fourth quartet. Not wishing to present an incomplete series, the Club managed to engage the Lindsay Quartet, which had premiered the new work, to return. Moreover, the Club persuaded Eastern Arts Association and the Arts Council (via the NFMS) to fund this extra performance. A vocal programme was also included with tenor Neil Jenkins and pianist Roger Vignoles performing Tippett's cantata *Boyhood's End* and the song-cycle *The Heart's Assurance*. It should perhaps be emphasised that the other works in all these programmes were standard repertoire. Tippett was enormously chuffed by the project: a major birthday would be celebrated by London venues and festivals, of course, but for a 'mere' music club to devise such a tribute was unprecedented. He sent a card to John Thompson saying how honoured he felt by the project.

The series was supposed to have begun with Tippett himself being interviewed by Antony Hopkins, with a short musical contribution by some students from the Royal College of Music playing the Sonata for four horns. Because of the NFMS award, this was to be something of a gala night with many VIPs, especially from the NFMS, present. However, on the very evening Tippett was taken ill on the way to Luton and was forced to return home. Consternation all round! But the evening was saved magnificently by Antony Hopkins, who had obviously done his homework, talking about the composer generally, and then by Raimund Herincx, who was invited as a vice-president, talking



Antony Hopkins and Raimund Herincx planning the recovered show

about working with Tippett in the operas *The Midsummer Marriage* and *The Knot Garden*, in which Ray had created leading roles of King Fisher and Faber respectively. Tippett made amends to the Club by coming to the Coull Quartet's concert in January, five days after his actual birthday, at which he was interviewed by Antony Hopkins.

An exhibition was specially devised by Schotts, Tippett's publisher, and set up on the second floor landing of the Library. It was called *A Man of Our Time*, an illusion no doubt to Tippett's popular oratorio *A Child of Our Time*. It was in place for about four weeks.



SIR MICHAEL TIPPETT
AND
GOULD STRING QUARTET
7th January 1960

Richard Tippett
Roger Cook Philip Callaway
David Luck Martin Thomas

THE 1979/80 SEASON

As if the Tippett series was not enough, two more composers were featured: Schumann and John Ireland. The latter was only a short tribute to mark the centenary of the composer's birth. The Schumann series was more extensive with works programmed in seven concerts.

The Ireland series featured some songs and a piano piece but notably Robert Cohen playing the cello sonata with his mother Anthya Rael in a concert which was a family affair, his father Raymond Cohen being a distinguished violinist. In another programme Angela Malsbury and David Pettit played Ireland's Fantasy Clarinet Sonata in a Clifton Trio programme in which soprano Angela Beale joined them for a second performance at the Club of Stephen Dodgson's *Gipsy Songs*, commissioned in 1976. Wherever possible the Club programmed further performances of the handful of works it had commissioned. There was much satisfaction in introducing other artists to music that they had not come across before. Hopefully that policy has produced more performances over the years. So often new pieces get performed once and are then neglected (sometimes justifiably so, of course!) but good pieces deserve occasional airings.



Robert Cohen



Christian Blackshaw

The Schumann series was sometimes linked in with the Tippett series, as when the Dartington Quartet was joined by pianist Christian Blackshaw in Schumann's Piano Quintet, Neil Jenkins sang his *Liederkreis* and the Strange Quartet played his A major Quartet. Fully interlocking programming!

Among other Schumann joys were the Australian pianist Gwenneth Pryor returning to play *Carnaval* and, in association with the Robert Schumann Society, a whole evening of the composer's music from soprano Marilyn Minns, baritone

Andrew Knight with pianists Norman Olsfanger and Graham Barber. Their programme included the song cycle *Frauenliebe und -leben*, the piano sonata Op 22, the piano duet piece *Bilder aus Osten* and more songs and vocal duets. Norman Olsfanger was not only a talented pianist but was equally at home with pen and ink as these caricatures of John Thompson and Chris Thomas from our Artists Visitor book show:



The Schumann series was launched by a talk by one of his biographers Joan Chissell, well-known at the time as a music critic on BBC Radio 3 and in *The Times*, *Gramophone Magazine* etc. Her talk also launched what was a new development – a series of talks usually related to forthcoming concerts given in the Music Library on the Thursday preceding the appropriate concert. Others in the series included composer Alan Bush returning after some years to talk about John Ireland; Leslie Minchin, who had achieved some fame as a translator of German lieder, talking about the problems of rendering the texts into English (the venture was not to last!); David Burden on the guitar (preceding a recital by Leo Witoszynskij and Timothy Walker; and Crispian Steele-Perkins on music for brass (preceding a concert by the Gallina Brass). Audience numbers were not great for this initiative and it did not last very long.

Two distinguished violin and piano recitals were highlights of the season: Erich Gruenberg and Yonty Solomon and later Hideko Udagawa and Marios Papadopoulos.



Erich Gruenberg



Yonty Solomon



Hideko Udagawa Marios Papadopoulos



Joss Ackland



Gary Karr

Lighter fare was provided by a night of opera and operetta with three singers, a return visit from the rumbustious City Waites, a music-and-letters programme about Handel which starred actor Joss Ackland and a quite hilarious evening with American double bass player Gary Karr who managed to draw an audience of 240 who were well-rewarded with stunning musicianship and highly amusing stage antics.

The membership fell from 305 to 250, with 91 failing to rejoin but 41 newcomers. The average audience fell slightly to 164 with only two concerts attracting over 200 people – Gary Karr, as just mentioned, and the City Waites.

This was the last season that the *Music in Luton* brochure was produced and a new format would be introduced in 1980. The other musical events in the town was an impressive list, though, with the Theatre hosting ballet and Chris Barber, several events at the Parish Church including the Hendon Brass Band, a piano duet recital, *A Medieval Christmas*, a carol party and the expected organ recitals, and even concerts in the Arndale Centre including the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Nonetheless it was becoming increasingly difficult to get organisations to provide information in time for printing, and so the Club went its own way.

THE 1980/81 SEASON

The new format brochure was based on the Wigmore Hall leaflet at the time (A3 folded into twelve panels). Concert listings were shorter and more chatty and the programme detail was abbreviated.



There were rather more artist photographs than in the past. Space was also found for a few other musical events in Luton as had been the recent practice. The trading name *Music on Mondays* was used for the first time.

The main feature was a series called *Featuring Mozart* and composers of the so-called English Renaissance. There were six programmes each built around a string quartet with added instruments. Each programme included one of the quartets Mozart dedicated to Haydn and a second Mozart piece, as well as two English works: Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Holst,

Warlock, Bliss, Lennox Berkeley, Bax, Alan Rawsthorne and Butterworth were the composers featured. The programmes were devised by Chris Thomas who then put them out to tender to twelve likely ensembles, six of which responded positively - which was lucky! The series was submitted for an NFMS Special Subsidy award but was turned down as not being adventurous enough - for Luton! Three concerts were sponsored by National Westminster Bank. Among the artists taking part were the Guadagnini Quartet, with tenor Ian Honeyman and others, the Locrian Quartet with clarinettist Colin Lawson, Capricorn with soprano Marilyn Minns, the Cummings String Trio with oboist Sarah Francis, the Capicchioni Ensemble and the distinguished tenor Ian Partridge with his pianist sister Jennifer who performed Butterworth's *A Shropshire Lad* and, with the Alberni Quartet, Vaughan Williams' *On Wenlock Edge*.



Ian Honeyman



Colin Lawson



Ian and Jennifer Partridge

Apart from this focus of Britishness, the season had a real international flavour with artists from Israel, Poland, Austria, Norway, Latvia and the United States. All three pianists came from abroad with the Norwegian Jan Henrik Kayser and two Polish virtuosi, Alicja Fiderkiewicz, who had won the Chopin Scholarship in Warsaw four years running and Janusz Stechley, who gave an alarming recital which caused a good deal of consternation backstage. After his first piece, Stechley came off the platform complaining that he felt unwell. A call for a doctor in the house brought forth two, both of whom attended him. After a while, he decided that he would try and continue with the recital but he immediately departed from the printed programme. After each piece, he said he would play just one more, but the recital went on and on like that. In the end he had to be practically hauled off the stage so that the audience could have an interval. Stechley continued afterwards and in the end gave one of the longest recitals ever. Curious behaviour but a pattern that was familiar to other promoters around the country, it was later learnt! He subsequently called

himself simply Janusz and later still reverted to Janusz Piotrovich Stechley. He was not invited back.



Rasma Lielmane



Sharon Isbin

There were sensational (in a good way!) concerts from the Israel Piano Trio and from the Latvian violinist Rasma Lielmane with Kathron Sturrock at the piano. The Austrian Institute contribution was the oboist Alfred Hertel with pianist Manfred Wagner, while also from Vienna came the wonderful Clemencic Consort, an early music group led by the recorder virtuosi René Clemencic, which thrilled the audience in an evening of Renaissance dances. From the US came the brilliant guitarist Sharon Isbin and also the soprano Elise Ross who, with clarinettist Anton Weinberg and pianist Peter Grunberg presented *Cabaret* – music by Kurt Weill, Gershwin, Stravinsky, Benny Goodman and others. Ross was married to Simon Rattle at the time and he came along at the end to collect her.



Among the up-and-coming was a young cellist called Steven Isserlis, then 22 years old and the winner of the 1979 NFMS Young Artist Award, and clearly on the brink of an incredibly successful career. Younger still were the Nottinghamshire girls' choir Cantamus; Pro Corda, a 12-

piece string ensemble from the National Association of Young String Players at Leiston Abbey in Suffolk; and the Manson Ensemble which was the Royal Academy of Music's contemporary music group. The Club was to use them several times for larger-scale programmes which would be otherwise unaffordable. They were always amenable to programme suggestions which their directors, the composer Paul Patterson, and later on the flautist Sebastian Bell invariably went along with. On this occasion the centenary of the birth of Bartók was marked with a programme of some of his most agreeable music including the early Piano Quintet and the five songs for voice and fifteen instruments.

The Thursday talks in the Music Library continued, with contributions from Stephen Lloyd introducing *The English Musical Renaissance*, Stephen Dodgson and David Bedford on *The Composer at Work* (two talks), Paul Spencer-Longhurst on *Music and Painting*, and music writer and critic Meirion Bowen (and Tippett's amanuensis) on Bartók. Due to lack of support these talks were then discontinued.

Membership fell again to 229. Average audience numbers were 164 (based on 20 concerts – figures for six were missing).

THE 1981/82 SEASON

The Club had now arrived at its 35th anniversary and was beginning to achieve national recognition for its enterprise and imaginative programming. A full page advertisement was taken out in the Herald newspaper containing an account of the forthcoming season supported by testimonials and accolades from a number of the most eminent musical knights of the realm, namely Sir Michael Tippett, Sir Yehudi Menuhin, Sir Charles



Michael Berkeley



Jan Latham-Koenig



Sir Lennox Berkeley

Groves, Sir William Walton, Sir Lennox Berkeley along with Michael Berkeley, Lady Shirley Beecham and, of course, Antony Hopkins. The cost of the advertisement was less than half the going rate and was paid for by Marks and Spencer. It is now in the Club archive. Most of these musical personalities had some link with the Club or were about to. The exception was Menuhin, for whose tribute Chairman John Thompson went to the great man's home in London. Michael Berkeley had been commissioned to write a new piece to mark the 35th anniversary: this was a piano trio which was first performed by members of the Koenig Ensemble (violinist

Paul Barritt, cellist Alexander Baillie and pianist Jan Latham-Koenig) on 18 January. Following our policy of arranging further performances of our commissioned works, the trio was heard again in 1984/85 played by the Nash Ensemble and again in 1991/92 played by the Dussek Trio. Also in the Koenig Ensemble's programme was the Horn Trio by Michael's father, Sir Lennox Berkeley, who made the first of several visits to the Club with his wife Freda.

Little of William Walton's music had been heard at the Club up until now, but it was decided to mark his 80th birthday with two concerts. The first was given by a chamber ensemble from the Royal College of Music with Richard Baker as reciter in a performance of the entertainment *Façade*, and the second was Walton's String Quartet played by the Pro Arte Quartet of Salzburg, presented in association with the Austrian Institute. This concert was to have been given by the Haydn Quartet of Eisenstadt but for some reason a change had to be made. Walton wrote to the Club "I am most proud and grateful that two concerts are being devoted to my works in celebration of my 80th birthday...".



Sir William Walton OM

As he lived in Ischia, he was never able to come to Luton in person, but his widow Susana did so many years later, to team up with Richard Baker in another performance of *Façade*.



Sir Charles Groves

One of the other musical knights in the advert did however come to the Club that season: Sir Charles Groves was one of the most celebrated British conductors. He was also at this time the President of the National Federation of Music Societies (now Making Music). He came to talk about his life in music. After his death in 1992 the NFMS established an annual prize in his memory to be awarded to someone from a member society who had made an outstanding contribution to the musical life of his or her community. In due course John Thompson was awarded this prize and Sir Charles' widow, Hilary Groves, came to Luton to present it to him.

Haydn was also featured in several concerts, marking the 250th anniversary of his birth. Among the artists involved was pianist-composer John McCabe on his first visit. John and his wife Monica were to have a long association with the Club and were in due course appointed as vice-presidents. John was a superb interpreter and champion of Haydn's piano music and on this



John McCabe



Hilary Davan Wetton

occasion played three sonatas as well as his own Piano Variations. Hardly any of John's music had been heard at the Club but that was about to change. In this current season, the Austrian Flieder Trio were persuaded to learn the String Trio, and trumpeter Crispian Steele-Perkins played the *Four Dances* for trumpet and piano in his entertaining lecture-recital.

Among other Haydn works was the *Trauer* Symphony, which was played by the Milton Keynes Chamber Orchestra under their conductor Hilary Davan Wetton. This was the first and only time the orchestra had played for the Club but it was a tight fit on the stage.

The last concert the Club presented in aid of the Rural Music Schools Association was given by violinist Manoug Parikian, cellist Amaryllis Fleming and pianist Bernard Roberts. The RMSA had announced that it was to close after all. Despite expansion which included the building of the Peter Morrison Recital Hall in 1976, the Hitchin HQ found itself in difficulties. In 1978 the Trustees sought to sell off the site for development, but a group of mainly local members formed an action group which ousted the old council and formed a new one. In 1986 it became the Benslow Music Trust. After the Trio's concert in October Sybil wrote a warm appreciation to John Thompson: "I am more grateful than I can say to you and your wonderful team for Monday's concert, and for your kindness to me (I have never been given flowers before on such occasions....). But it was a very special occasion for me, being my very last concert for RMS and I could not have wished for it in more sympathetic surroundings nor a better programme. I will always remember it with gratitude and affection for your wonderful Music Club. Please tell your Committee how touched I was and how much I thank them. What a wonderful Friend of Music you are!"



Amaryllis Fleming

A new departure was the final concert of the season which was given at Gosmore End House, near Hitchin, the home of Mr & Mrs David Moore. A pianist herself, June Moore was and is a staunch supporter of the Club (and of course now the regular and much admired page-turner). The Moore's extensive house included a large music room which could seat 70 or so people. The Moores invited the Club to hold its pre-Christmas musical soirée as a pleasant change from the Theatre which was by now becoming booked up with pantomime at this time of the year, but for some reason the event had to be moved to the Spring. The Committee provided a cold supper with wine after the concert, which was given by local artists – a singer, flautist, clarinettist, guitarist and pianist. Tickets were of course limited as they had been at Quinville House. The house later became a nursing home.



Paul O'Dette

A sensational early music concert was presented by the American group The Musicians of Swanee Alley, led by lutenists Paul O'Dette and Lyle Nordstrom. This programme, *Music of Shakespeare's England and Michelangelo's Italy*, was delivered with such exuberance and theatrical flair that it brought the house down. It was in sharp contrast to another Early Music Network offering, by a somewhat po-faced group called Concerto Castello who took everything so very seriously. These two concerts were lessons in how and how not to put across early music to non-specialist audiences.

Other artists from abroad also graced the stage. The Frankfurt Guitar Duo, Michael Teuchert and Olaf van Gonnissen, were regarded as the successors to the Julian Bream-John Williams collaboration. And another winner in the Carl Flesch Violin Competition, the young Japanese Kuniko Nagata, who won the Audience Prize in 1980, dazzled a large audience of 170. The American James Tyler brought back his New Excelsior Talking Machine in an evening of ragtime classics which was once again received with great enthusiasm.



Philip Fowke



Melissa Phelps

Young newcomers to Club included the now-renowned Endellion String Quartet, the young pianist Philip Fowke, winner of the NFMS Young Artist Award, and the charismatic cellist Melissa Phelps with pianist John York. The Endellions gave a pre-concert talk in the theatre on Britten's third quartet which was in their programme. This was the first time such a talk had been arranged. About 40 people attended. Even younger talent was on show with a concert given by five of the most promising music students from Luton and South Bedfordshire, introduced and accompanied at the piano by County Music Advisor Michael Rose.

The membership dropped slightly to 217, while the average attendance, based on 21 concerts (some figures are missing) was 170, a very slight increase on 1980/81.

Funding was now being obtained from a variety of sources. The NFMS was the main benefactor, but other grants came from Eastern Arts Association, Bedfordshire County Council, Luton Arts Council, the Performing Right Society and the RVW Trust. The Library itself also contributed to two concerts. Funding was starting to be a sophisticated art form in its own right and John Thompson was developing considerable skills in extracting money from several likely organisations and businesses. The vital need for external funding would continue: without it, admission prices would have become unacceptably high.

INTERLUDE 3: THE BREAKDOWN OF PREJUDICE

The 1982/83 season included a major feature which tackled head-on the problem of getting audiences sympathetic towards contemporary music. Various programmes of modern music in the past had been unsuccessful and indeed discomforting to audiences. It was thought that, in the series as long as the Club's, music of recent times should find a place, but that on the other hand, the more avant-garde styles were simply too daunting for the ordinary music-loving audience to appreciate. At the same time it was becoming apparent that there was a good deal of music of our time which was approachable and enjoyable to those with open ears. It was time to take the bull by the horns and do something really positive to break down the prejudice against contemporary music.

Accordingly, a series of six programmes was drawn up including works by composers whose music was likely to appeal to ordinary music-loving listeners. In other words, no squeaky gate stuff! The programmes also included more familiar works from the so-called 'standard repertoire'. In preparing this series, Chris Thomas did quite a lot of research for this project, mainly at the British Music Information Centre. The very helpful Director was a charming young man called Roger Wright, who went on to greater things at the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Cleveland Orchestra, Deutsche Grammophon and the BBC. It must be admitted that, in devising the series, one eye was firmly fixed on the NFMS Special Subsidy scheme and indeed the series so impressed the Federation that a second award was easily won. It went under the title *The Breakdown of Prejudice* for the purposes of the funding application, although this title was not used publicly. Indeed the Club's publicity did not pay attention to the scheme at all for fear it might deter the punters!



Roger Wright (a more recent picture!)

The application was accompanied by a 'manifesto' which set out the thinking behind the series and its aims. This was reprinted in the journal of the Association of British Composers of which John McCabe's wife, Monica, was editor at the time. To accompany our manifesto she wrote a fulsome article about us. For that publicity she was made a vice-president alongside her husband. This article and our manifesto are in the archive.

The first concert was given by the Bochmann String Quartet (with star players Michael Bochmann, David Angel, Gustav Clarkson and Sebastian Comberti, all of whom were to become stalwarts of the chamber music scene) with the sensational Brazilian pianist José Feghali. Their featured composer was Franz Reizenstein, a naturalised Briton who came to England from Germany in 1934. He died in 1968. The piece was the Piano Quintet of 1949, a passionate neo-Romantic piece which appealed to the audience immensely, so much so that a second performance was programmed two years later. It was just the right piece to launch this series. Reizenstein's widow, Margaret, came to the concert and to others in later seasons when her husband's music was being performed. She was a great admirer of our work. The Reizenstein was supported by a Haydn quartet and the Brahms Piano Quintet. The second concert brought the Albion Ensemble, a wonderful piano and wind ensemble with such gifted players as Philippa Davies, George Caird, Andrew Marriner, Felix Warnock, Robin Martin and William Howard, all of whom were to re-appear at the Club quite often and to become good friends and admirers.



Franz Reizenstein



José Feghali

The programme here was very much in the form of a light-hearted entertainment. The contemporary element comprised Paul Patterson's *Comedy for Five Winds* (1972), now a staple of the wind quintet repertoire, Malcolm Williamson's *Pas de Quatre* (1967), and Christopher Brown's



Paul Patterson



Malcolm Williamson

Divertimento before Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor* (1963). The other works were Rimsky-Korsakov's Quintet for piano and wind, and Bizet's *Jeux d'enfants* in an arrangement for wind quintet.



Christopher Brown

Chris Brown was known to the Club through his own involvement with the NFMS and local societies in Huntingdon and Cambridge. Both he and Paul Patterson came to this concert.

The third concert was given by the oboist Sarah Francis, returning to play this time with the Cummings String Trio (violinist Diana Cummings, her violist husband Luciano Iorio, and cellist Geoffrey Thomas). Their programme included Michael Berkeley's String Trio (1980) and the *Little Epiphany Variations* for oboe and cello by Gordon Crosse (1979), as well as music by Bach, Boccherini and Mozart. The music of both Berkeley and Crosse had been heard at the Club before, notably in Michael's new piano trio commissioned the previous year. Both composers came to the concert and Gordon Crosse gave a pre-concert talk on his music.

In the fourth concert the Gillard Quartet played Edmund Rubbra's second string quartet and *Dialectic* by Alan Bush, who had been to the Club on several occasions over the years. He came this time, too, and gave a pre-concert talk. They also played Schubert's A minor Quartet D804 and Brahms' Op 67.

The fifth concert was altogether a larger affair with the Hanson String Quartet joined by flautist Dave Heath, clarinettist Julia Rayson and harpist Gillian Tingay. This is of course the line-up for Ravel's popular *Introduction and Allegro* which was in the programme along with Alun Hoddinott's Variations for Septet (1969), Stephen Dodgson's *Septet-Variations* (1975), William Mathias' *Zodiac Trio* (1976) and music by Jean Françaix and Roussel. Stephen Dodgson gave a pre-concert talk.



Alun Hoddinott



William Mathias



Robert Simpson in Luton

The final concert in the series was given by the Delmé Quartet playing Robert Simpson's Quartet No 7 (1977) and a Haydn quartet and, with Kenneth Essex as second viola, the Brahms String Quintet. Robert Simpson came to give a pre-

concert talk. The series was a clear success with audiences and certainly helped to break the 'prejudice' – as hoped!

THE 1982/83 SEASON

Apart from the *Breakdown of Prejudice*, there was also a Brahms series, marking the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth in May 1833. Three Brahms works were programmed in the contemporary series, as mentioned above, and four other concerts included his music. These included the return of Peter and Raphael Wallfisch with clarinettist Anton Weinberg to play the Brahms Clarinet Trio and one of the clarinet sonatas, the pianist Philip Mead, the Eder Quartet from Hungary, and the winners of the first Eastern Arts Association Young Musicians Platform, the pianist Yolande Wrigley and the Hartley Piano Trio, whose pianist was Caroline Clemmow, who later became well known to Club audiences.



Leslie Howard

Two other anniversaries were also celebrated: the centenary of the birth of Percy Grainger was marked with a recital by Leslie Howard who also gave a pre-concert talk on the composer. And Sir Lennox Berkeley's 80th birthday was honoured with a delightful programme



Meriel Dickinson

devised in association with Sir Lennox, including his Oboe Quartet and *Chinese Songs*. The performers were pianist Peter Dickinson and his mezzo-soprano sister, Meriel, oboist Douglas Boyd, violist Roger Tapping, cellist William Conway and pianist Iain Burnside. There was also some of Sir Lennox's favourite music by Mozart, Poulenc, and Fauré. Peter Dickinson gave a pre-concert talk on the composer. As might be expected Sir Lennox and his wife Freda came to the concert and a



Douglas Boyd

good time was had by all. Sir Lennox was presented with gifts in the form of full scores of Verdi's *Requiem* and *Rigoletto* and miniature scores of Beethoven's piano concertos.

The regular links continued to be patronised: from the offerings of the Early Music Network the Club selected violinist Monica Huggett with lutenist Jakob Lindberg, and also the Classical Piano Trio whose members included John Holloway, Susan Shepherd and Melvyn Tan, who was to become a distinguished solo pianist. And the Contemporary Music Network offered an irresistible cracker of a programme by the Songmakers' Almanac



Robin Holloway



Philip Langridge

in which the leading tenor Philip Langridge and pianist Graham Johnson, not to mention five female voices, performed Janáček's *Diary of One who Disappeared*, English songs of the First World War era and Robin Holloway's new piece *Women in War*, described as 'a revue for four female vocalists and piano' (1982). Holloway, who came to the concert and gave a pre-concert talk, said that the work 'presents a sweeping panorama of female

activity, industrial, nursing, domestic, setting fragments of poems (mainly by women but including Gurney, Kipling, Rosenberg), commentary, diary, from the same dark yet supercharged epoch [the First World War].'

The Austrian Institute contribution was quite a novelty. They had been asked for something truly Austrian rather than just another pianist or violinist or whatever. And they came up with the Hutter Family of Salzburg, which presented an evening of folk music in costume. Talk about *The Sound of Music!* It was a great success and they went on to perform at The Stables at Wavendon and at Toddington Music Society.

A delightful words-and-music programme also provided lighter fare. Entitled *The Monstrous Regiment of Women* it was organised by the lutenist Robert Spencer and his soprano wife Jill Nott-Bower who had entertained the Club some years earlier.



Derek Waring and Dorothy Tutin

The words were originally supposed to be read by Judi Dench and Michael Williams but, in the way of actors, they had to withdraw. Their place was taken by another husband and wife team, Dorothy Tutin and Derek Waring. Not surprisingly, this entertainment drew an audience of almost 200.

More astonishingly, over 200 were attracted to the Danish recorder player Michala Petri and her family trio in a rare programme of baroque and 20th century Danish music.



Michala Petri

Despite all these wonderfully talented professionals, there was the odd committee voice who thought the Club should be more homely. In an echo of the earliest years of the Club, someone suggested that 'there may be members who would be willing to perform for the club and that an evening in the season could be set aside for this purpose. ...it was agreed that selection would be extremely difficult and raise many problems. It was agreed that the main role of the club was to provide facilities for professional artists and that this policy, in the interests of the town and of the maintenance of professional standards, should be firmly upheld.' So there!

Membership was fairly stable at 203 and the average audience was 160 with only one or two concerts exceeding 200.

An external bit of excitement was the Bedfordshire Knock-out Music Quiz. These ran for several years and were organised by Austin Baker, Music Librarian at Bedford Library. They were held in the Library and involved eight Bedfordshire music societies. The Club was invited to take part in 1982 and fielded the team of John Thompson, Fred Fensome and Chris Thomas. Questions, mainly involving recognising snippets of musical works, were ingenious and usually quite difficult but nevertheless the quizzes were invariably enormous fun – even for those taking part, which was nerve-racking. The Club reached the final quite a few times and actually won on two occasions.

In 1983 Chris Thomas was invited to join the Eastern Arts Association's Music Panel, on which a place was reserved for a member of an NFMS music society. He held this role for five years, becoming Vice-Chairman in 1985 (the chairman was composer Gordon Crosse).

THE 1983/84 SEASON

Schubert's last years formed the focus of the main theme this season, with performances of some major works in several concerts, notably by some leading string quartets: the Endellion returned to play the A major quartet, the Amphion tackled *Death and the Maiden* along with Michael Berkeley's



Keiko Tokunaga



Rosemarie Wright and Yossi Zivoni

quartet and Borodin, the Albarni offered the G major quartet in a Contemporary Music Network concert which also featured Britten's first quartet and Maxwell Davies' 1961 essay (plus a pre-concert talk on Max by Paul Driver), and the Fitzwilliam were joined by cellist Moray Welsh in the String Quintet. Also in the Schubert series were the Japanese pianist Keiko Tokunaga, violinist Yossi Zivoni and pianist Rosemarie Wright, the

Trio Zingara playing the E flat piano trio and Bedelian Piano Quartet tackling the B flat trio, the Baccholian Singers with some of Schubert's delectable part-songs, and the Schubert Ensemble of London. The series was launched with a pre-concert talk by Ivor Keys, a great authority on the composer.

Apart from Schubert, there were centenary tributes to Bax, Smetana, Borodin and the eccentric Lord Berners, who was celebrated by a very entertaining programme by the mezzo Meriel Dickinson and her pianist brother Peter. Arnold Bax's music had been little played at the Club and it was interesting to hear his Trio for flute, viola and harp and the Sonata for viola and harp played by the Erard Harp Trio who also included music by Michael Berkeley and Stephen Dodgson in their enterprising programme. Stephen Lloyd gave a pre-concert talk on Bax.

A second Contemporary Music Network concert was given by the fine cellist Alexander Baillie with his equally superb pianist Kathron Sturrock, who played the difficult Cello Sonata by Elliott Carter,



Alexander Baillie



Kathron Sturrock

almost certainly the first time that composer's music had been heard at the Club. This somewhat 'gritty' piece was gently supported by Beethoven, Schumann and Shostakovich. Another pre-concert talk on Carter was given by Andrew Clements.



Elliott Carter



Catherine Bott

The Early Music Network was also used again, this time presenting the prestigious New London Consort in a programme called *The Italian Virtuosi*. Starring soprano Catherine Bott, Philip Pickett on recorder, Tom Finucane on lute and David Roblou on harpsichord, this was music-making of rare class. Philip Pickett gave a pre-concert talk on Italian 17th century music. The Club continued to make use of another subsidised scheme, the



Philip Pickett

National Federation of Music Societies Award for Young Concert Artists, with recitals by the Scottish baritone Stewart Buchanan (the 1982 winner), and pianist Benjamin Frith (the 1983 winner) who was to return to Club many times in the coming years. His recital was scheduled as a short entertainment to follow the Annual General Meeting, as a way of attracting more people to the AGM. This practice continued for a number of years before it was dropped as being unfair to the artists. Indeed the NFMS eventually discouraged societies from using their artists in this way. A new young musicians' opportunity had recently arisen with the

establishment of the Eastern Arts Association Young Musicians Platform, and the Club promptly engaged the 1982 winners, the oboist Marios Argiros, and pianist Caroline Clemmow who was to



Benjamin Frith



Robin Colvill

visit the Club often in the ensuing years, most often with fellow-pianist Anthony Goldstone, who later became her husband. Marios gave up the oboe and later became a renowned yoga teacher based in Crete.

The Club's connection with the Austrian Institute also continued with a concert by the Residenz Solisten

Salzburg, a flute, oboe and string trio line-up, who teamed up with British pianist Robin Colvill. The collaboration did not continue for long.

The season had been launched with an informal cheese-and-wine reception in the Library hosted by Antony Hopkins. The idea was to publicise the work of the Club more widely and to try and attract sponsors, potential candidates having been invited to the launch along with other arts people in Luton.

Membership was now 190 and the average audience was 147.

THE 1984/85 SEASON

The success of the *Breakdown of Prejudice* project in 1982/83 led the Club to devise a sequel series. This time each of the six programmes would focus on a particular composer, with half the music in each concert being by the composer in question and the other half being standard repertoire. This series also won a Special Subsidy award (by this time called the Exceptional Event scheme) from the NFMS. The grant from the Federation was a massive £11,005, the largest ever given to any music club, such was the favour in which the series and indeed the Club generally was held. The programmes were devised in consultation with the composers who were also invited to give pre-concert talks, apart from Franz Reizenstein, the only one of the six no longer living. The other five were Robert Simpson, Michael Berkeley, John McCabe, Elizabeth Maconchy and Graham Whettam. The talks were funded by the Luton Arts Council and Eastern Arts Association.



Graham Whettam

The Reizenstein programme brought back the Cohen Trio who played the composer's violin and cello sonatas along with Schubert and Dvořák. Reizenstein's widow Margaret gave the pre-concert talk. For the Michael Berkeley programme the Club engaged the Nash Ensemble with a wonderful line-up of eight players, performing the composer's Chamber Symphony and Piano Trio, which the Club had commissioned in 1982. Music by Mozart and Hummel completed this concert. John McCabe's event was an equally ambitious concoction with seven instrumentalists from the Endymion Ensemble and soprano Marie Storch, conducted by John Whitfield in two pieces by McCabe, *Desert III: Landscape* and *Time Remembered*, with music by Mozart, Ravel and Haydn. Elizabeth Maconchy's concert was given by the Locrian Quartet and included two of her short string quartets plus Mozart and Beethoven. Graham Whettam's programme was given by the Elysian Wind Quintet with Anthony Goldstone at the piano, playing the composer's *Quintetto Concertato* and Sextet. The Robert Simpson concert was given by the Delmé Quartet and featured Simpson's large-scale fifth quartet along with Beethoven's second *Rasumovsky* quartet, which inspired it.

The Beethoven quartets were part of another series featuring the so-called middle period works, namely the three *Rasumovsky* quartets, and Op 74 and 95. The other three groups taking part



Alban Berg



Julian Jacobson

were the Roth, the Fairfield and the Buchberger from Germany, all of them young and exceptionally gifted. The Buchberger also took part in yet another series of three consecutive concerts marking the centenary of the birth of Alban Berg. The other artists were clarinettist Michael Collins (who was also in the Nash Ensemble) with pianist Kathryn Stott, and the mezzo Susan Tyrrell with pianist Julian Jacobson (formerly Julian Dawson-Lyell). Berg's output was very small, especially of chamber music, but the series managed to include the Piano Sonata Op 1, the Four Songs Op 2, the String Quartet Op 3 and the Four Pieces for clarinet and piano Op 5.

Once again the Club took advantage of the Early Music Network with concerts by the Medieval Ensemble of London and a group called Circa 1500, which presented vocal and instrumental music from the court of Henry VIII. In 1985 Chris Thomas was invited to join the panel to select the winner of the first EMN Young Artists Competition. Chris was invited as the non-specialist promoter on the group. Unanimously the panel chose the oboist Paul Goodwin as the most outstanding candidate. The Club engaged him two seasons later.

However, the Club had ceased supporting the Arts Council's Contemporary Music Network which was becoming too alienating for ordinary promoters and the concerts tended to be booked only by specialised festivals and concert series. The regional arts associations recognised this development and accordingly decided to set up their own contemporary music touring schemes. Eastern Arts Association planned its own scheme through a sub-committee of the Music Panel.



Bernard Stevens



Harvey Dagul and Isabel Beyer

Chris Thomas was invited to be the chairman of the panel. The scheme ran for a few years, but even with more audience-friendly programmes on offer, it proved difficult to attract many promoters. From the first batch of artists the Club selected the Farnaby Brass Ensemble which played music by Malcolm Arnold, Gordon Jacob and Bernard Stevens, alongside arrangements of baroque classics – not a

programme to frighten audiences! Bernard Stevens was a distinguished British composer who wrote in a somewhat conventional idiom – none the worse for that. He had died in 1983 but his widow, Bertha, promulgated his work evangelically. She latched onto the Club as a potential ally in this ambition and visited whenever a piece of Stevens' music was on the programme. She became something of a nuisance, forever badgering Chris Thomas to programme more of her husband's music. Stevens was also championed by the St Albans-based husband-and-wife piano duo Isabel Beyer and Harvey Dagul who also played a piece of Stevens' music this same season and who were to play for the Club several times thereafter.



Bernard Roberts

Among other pianists to appear were Bernard Roberts, who had played for the Club with the Richards Piano Quartet in 1975. He too was destined to be a frequent visitor, as was William Howard, who in this season played with violinist Paul Barritt, yet another regular over the years. These two marked the centenary of the death of Smetana with solos and a duo. Return visits were becoming a regular feature of planning, as was the case with many music clubs. Club members invariably remembered impressive performers and welcomed opportunities to hear them again. In the case of chamber music, one found many artists appearing with all manner of different ensembles, such that they became good friends of the Club and helped spread the word about its warm welcome and enterprising programming.

Other returning favourites were the broadcaster Richard Baker who opened the season with pianist Raphael Terroni in their entertainment of songs, poetry, prose and piano music; and Graham Johnson's Songmakers' Almanac, this time with soprano Caroline Friend and tenor Julian Pike. More vocal music was on offer with the return of opera to the theatre stage, with performances by a group called Opera Lirica of a double bill comprising Menotti's *The Telephone* and Wolf-Ferrari's *Susanna's Secret*.



Sir Thomas and Lady (Shirley) Beecham

The pre-Christmas event was a special social evening in the Library with wine and refreshments at which Shirley, Lady Beecham presented a talk on her famous husband's recorded legacy illustrated with some private recordings of the great conductor.

An Extraordinary General Meeting was held to discuss falling membership (198!) and the future of the Club. All manner of ideas were put forward which read like a list from more recent times, some of which were acted upon. The question of using the trading name Music on Mondays rather than Luton Music Club was endlessly debated, but in the end the MoM name prevailed. Sounds familiar? The worry of having a mere 198 members seems very strange to us today.

In May 1984 the Club was victorious in the county-wide knockout music quiz in Bedford, beating Bedford Music Club in the final very handsomely with its winning team of Fred Fensome, Richard McGregor and Chris Thomas. The victors' shield donated by National Westminster Bank was presented by Lady Barbirolli and subsequently brought back to Luton where it was displayed for a year in the Music Library.

At the 1985 AGM the composers Sir Lennox Berkeley, Michael Berkeley, Stephen Dodgson and Robert Simpson were all elected vice-presidents. As a result the Club endeavoured to programme their music whenever opportunities presented themselves. Sir Lennox died in 1989 but his vice-presidency was transferred to his widow Freda, who had accompanied him on his several visits to the Club. Robert Simpson later moved to Ireland where he died in 1997 although for a while after that the Club maintained contact with his widow Angela.



Freda and Lennox Berkeley

Following the major Arts Council report *The Glory of the Garden*, funding of music societies was transferred from the NFMS to the regional arts associations. A sub-committee was set up by Eastern

Arts Association to deal with assessments and allocations. It was manned by representatives of Eastern Region societies as EAA did not have the expertise!

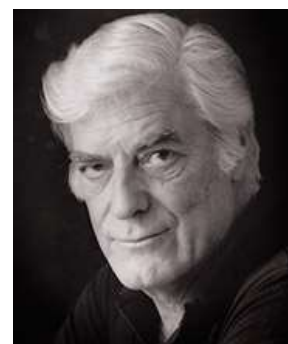
There were 205 members at the end of the season. So much for falling membership!

THE 1985/86 SEASON

Following the previous season's survey of Beethoven's middle period string quartets, this season featured the composer's last five quartets – the so-called Late Quartets. To play them the Club engaged some really top ensembles – the Pržák from Prague, the Allegri, the Brodsky, the



Barbara Leigh-Hunt



Norman Rodway

Varsovia from Poland, and the Fairfield. The Pržák also took part in *A Celebration of Czech and Slovak Music* throughout October, a national event focusing on this repertoire in which the Club decided to participate. The Pržák played Martinů and Franz-Xavier Richter. Also in the series were the Medici String Quartet who presented *Intimate Voices*, a words-and-music portrait of Janáček with the distinguished actors Barbara Leigh-Hunt and Norman Rodway; the Academia Wind Quintet of Prague and the pianist Radoslav Kvapil, both playing all Czech/Slovak programmes.



Radoslav Kvapil

The 80th birthday of composer William Alwyn was due to be celebrated in November with performances of four of his works but his death earlier in 1985 turned the birthday into a tribute post-mortem.

There were two successive concerts, the first by the Ondine Ensemble (flute, harp and string trio) and the second by a return from the ever versatile Capricorn. It is interesting to note that on the first occasion a pre-concert talk on the composer was given by the aforementioned Roger Wright.

An earlier British composer, George Butterworth, was also celebrated in a concert to mark the centenary of his birth. Baritone Henry Herford, pianist Robin Bowman and the Hanson String Quartet gave the composer's song cycles *Bredon Hill*, *Love Blows As The Wind Blows* and *A Shropshire Lad*, along with Elgar's Piano Quintet. This was another concert from the Eastern Arts Circuit. The Club also took two further concerts from the Circuit: the piano quartet Domus, just starting to make a big name for itself, and The Entertainers Clarinet Quartet with soprano Mary Wiegold.

There was an extraordinary line-up of pianists who were just beginning their immensely successful careers: Barry Douglas, Christian Zacharias and Stephen Hough. It was always satisfying to engage young stars of the future before they hit the big time, and of course before they became



Barry Douglas



Christian Zacharias



Stephen Hough

too expensive.

This season saw the Golden Jubilee of the National Federation of Music Societies which encouraged clubs, choirs and orchestras to arrange celebratory concerts across

the country. The Club mounted a very special entertainment to start the season, led by Sir Peter Pears, and with tenor Adrian Thompson, horn player Jonathan Williams and pianist John Blakeley. Pears had had a stroke by this time and could no longer sing but he was determined to continue performing somehow, and so he took up reciting to music. Thus this programme included Schubert's melodrama *Abschied von der Erde*, and an Edith Sitwell sequence including Britten's setting of *Still falls the rain*, and poems by Auden and James Thurber, along with songs by

Schubert and Frank Spedding and Beethoven's Horn Sonata. Sadly within six months Pears was dead.

After the AGM the Club presented a short recital by the latest winner of the NFMS Award for Young Concert Artists. This time it was the Luton-born soprano Christine Bunning who was to grace our platform on many subsequent occasions.



Christine Bunning

There were around 15 people on the Committee at this time. There tended to be a few passengers since people were invited to volunteer to join the committee without any indication of what skills would be useful. It was some time before such requests to the membership became specific about the jobs that needed filling. Once that was done, the team became much more efficient overall. That is not to say that there were not some very active and imaginative contributors for many of whom nothing was too much trouble. There was an enormous pride in the Club and what it had achieved.

Funding was becoming a major task as applications were made to several organisations. Apart from the NFMS and Eastern Arts Association and Luton Arts Council, in 1985 applications were made to the Michael Tippett Musical Foundation, the Performing Right Society, Bedfordshire County Council, the Ralph Vaughan Williams Trust, the Hinrichsen Foundation, and the Walter Guinness Charitable Trust. Most of these were successful. In addition, indirect subsidy was obtained by taking advantage of schemes such as the Eastern Arts Circuit and the Early Music Network. All this helped the Club to maintain low prices for subscriptions and tickets. Eastern Arts, however, indicated more than once that our subscriptions in particular were too cheap, but the Club maintained that the local authority help was specifically designed to enable the less well-off to take advantage of the concerts.

Membership was now 202 and the average attendance (24 concerts) was 152, the highest being the Brodsky at 192.

The Library Theatre was now renamed St George's Theatre and would remain so for some years until it eventually reverted to the original name.

THE 1986/87 SEASON

The fortieth anniversary of the Club was celebrated with a *Soirée Musicale* in the Library. Music was provided by Alan Barker on flute and Rachel Masters on harp, followed after a supper interval by a cabaret given by soprano Christine Bunning and pianist Ivor Keys. The supper with wine was arranged by the committee and numerous VIPs were invited.

The main theme of the season was an incredibly adventurous Scandinavian focus in which music from Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland featured in no less than fourteen programmes. Apart from the obvious composers such as Grieg, Nielsen and Sibelius, audiences heard music by Franz Berwald, Vagn Holmboe, Per Norgaard, Erik Tulindberg, Gunnar de Frumerie, Dag Wirén, Emil Sjögren, Niels Gade, Selim Palmgren, Niels Viggo Bentzon, Vilhelm Stenhammar and others even more obscure. The amount of co-operation by musicians to prepare such a programme cannot be over-estimated, nor can the work involved in researching the repertoire. Nor indeed can the loyal willingness of the audience to explore rare and little-heard repertoire. The series achieved an average of 147 attendance.

Among the artists taking part in this series were the Koenig Ensemble, tenor Ian Partridge with lutenist Jakob Lindberg, cellist Lars Blomberg with pianist Radoslav Kvapil, the Peterborough String Orchestra, Australian mezzo-soprano Susan Kessler, who was to die tragically young not long afterwards, with Roger Vignoles, pianist Vovka Ashkenazy and the Hertz Trio of Canada.



Vovka Ashkenazy
(when older!)



Hertz Trio of Canada

It was amusing that Ashkenazy drew an audience of 237, almost a full house. It just showed what a famous name could do, although one wondered how many people imagined that they would be hearing father Vladimir rather than the son!

Three other pianists were programmed, in an equally enterprising mini-series entitled *The Piano in the Twentieth Century*, not a title to draw the crowds, one might think. But an average of 140 people turned up to hear Anthony

Goldstone in a programme called *Dances and Studies*, featuring music by John McCabe, Thomas Pitfield, Colin Matthews, Manos Hadjidakis (of *Never on Sunday* fame) and Kodály along with Chopin and Schubert; John McCabe himself in *Images and Impressions*, with works by Peter Sculthorpe, Elgar, David Maslanka, Richard Rodney Bennett, plus some Debussy and Ravel; and Peter Lawson, presenting *The Voice of America* – music by Copland, Wendell Keeney, Samuel Barber, Henry Cowell and Gershwin. This series presented a considerable challenge to the audience as may be imagined. It justifiably won an award from the Michael Tippett Musical Foundation.

But there were further challenges elsewhere: the Horn Trio by Bernard Stevens, new pieces by Julian Grant, Gareth Walters and John Lunn, and works by Walton, Bridge and Britten. At the lighter end of the musical spectrum Music Deco presented an entertainment based on the cabaret



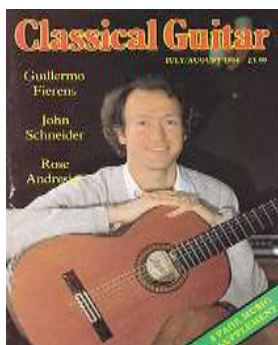
Marisa Robles



Melvyn Tan

music of the 20s and 30s, violinist Raymond Cohen and his pianist wife Anthya Rael returned to give a *Souvenir de Vienne* – from Mozart to Johann Strauss, and Marisa Robles paid her second visit to the Club to celebrate her 25 years on the concert platform, talking about her career and playing on three different harps. Added to that was an Early Music Network concert from the Chandos Baroque Players, featuring harpsichordist Melvyn Tan, in a programme *Vauxhall to Venice*; one of the most prominent male vocal groups Pro Cantione

Antiqua in a programme of 16th and 17th century English part-songs and madrigals; and the Portuguese Segovia pupil Guillermo Fierens who gave a recital of mainly Latin American music in the Library.



Guillermo Fierens

The season's programme was summed up neatly by Sir Michael Tippett in a 40th anniversary tribute to the Club when he wrote that 'with imaginative programme planning and a diversity of accomplished performers, the Luton club has been able to provide its audiences with constant stimulation and artistic rewards for some decades'. This was printed in the annual brochure along with similar fulsome tributes from Sir Lennox Berkeley, Sir William Walton, Sir Yehudi Menuhin and of course Antony Hopkins.

None of this adventurousness seemed to affect audience levels: the average for the 23 concerts was a respectable 150. The membership remained a healthy 198. One aspect which was not so well supported was the pre-concert talks which had continued for a number of years. This season they were dropped altogether. One scheme for encouraging loyalty was to ask members to pay their subscriptions at the end of the previous season with the incentive of a discount. This worked well and has been continued every since.

At the AGM the Club welcomed for the first time a young pianist who had won the Royal Overseas League's 'Commonwealth Musician of the Year' Gold Medal in 1983. His name was Jonathan Plowright and he was to return to play for us several times. He later became acclaimed globally as a truly exceptional pianist.



Jonathan Plowright

THE 1987/88 SEASON

After the excursions into rare musical fare the previous season, it was probably a relief to rediscover more familiar repertoire in a season which made a feature of the music of Schumann, Ravel and Frank Bridge. To some extent the three themes were interlinked. Antony Hopkins launched the Schumann series, followed by the wonderful but now largely forgotten pianist John Bingham. Altogether some fifteen chamber and piano works and song cycles were performed in thirteen concerts given by several returning favourites such as Christine Bunning, the Schubert



John Bingham



Graham Johnson



Gabriel Woolf

Ensemble of London, Julian Jacobson, the Delmé Quartet, and the Coull Quartet. A highlight was the return of Felicity Lott and Graham Johnson with Lott's husband Gabriel Woolf in a words-and-music programme about Schumann and his wife Clara Wieck.



Frank Bridge



Herbert Howells

The Ravel series included ten chamber, piano and vocal works in eight concerts, while the Bridge series included five works in four concerts. The Frank Bridge Trust supported the series with a grant of £500, very generous in those days. The Bridge feature was the start of a three-season focus, the first time such a survey had been attempted at the Club. But Bridge was not the only British composer to be heard: Ireland's *Phantasie* Piano Trio was played by the Dartington Trio, Herbert Howells' *Fantasy* String Quartet was given by the Hanson Quartet and brass quintets by Christopher Brown and Vice-president Stephen Dodgson were offered by the Fine Arts Brass Ensemble in the first of several

visits. Indeed music by all the composer vice-presidents was incorporated into the programme, with Robert Simpson's tenth quartet played by the Coull, Michael Berkeley's *Nocturne* and another Dodgson piece, the *Solway Suite*, were played by the enterprising flute, harp and string trio ensemble Jeux. Lennox Berkeley's Viola Sonata was performed by Rosemary Sanderson and John Gough in the Kegelstatt Trio's concert and John McCabe's Oboe Quartet was given in an Eastern Arts Circuit concert by the Quentin Poole Oboe Quintet, which also included the Bliss Quintet.

Two other Eastern Arts Circuit concerts were extraordinarily interesting. First a group called Czárdás, led by violinist Rosemary Furniss and cellist Melissa Phelps with piano and cimbalom. They coupled gipsy-inspired music by Ravel, Kodály, Liszt and Monti with three pieces by Peter Maxwell Davies including his rarely-heard sonata for violin and cimbalom. Secondly, Paul Barritt's superb Divertimenti Ensemble offered *A Viennese Night – with a Difference!* which brought together some Schubert with Richard Strauss and Schoenberg's string sextet *Verklärte Nacht*.

The Early Music Network was represented by oboist Paul Goodwin who had won the 1985 Young Artists Competition run by the Network, with Nicholas Parle on harpsichord, and by the Dowland Consort directed by Jakob Lindberg



Ronan O'Hora

Among other highlights were fast-rising Ulster pianist Ronan O'Hora, the Wind Soloists of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, and the Aranjuez Guitar Trio. Local talent was to the fore in a master class for young Bedfordshire cellists led by Moray Welsh, and by the post-AGM recital given by another young cellist, Joanne Cole, from Bedford, with pianist Deborah Shah.



Paul Goodwin



Jakob Lindberg

The membership had fallen slightly to 180, while the average audience was 142. There were as usual constant concerns about publicity and a lot of effort was put into displays in libraries, shop windows or wherever opportunities presented themselves. Eastern Arts continued to reprimand the Club for being too cheap for the quality of what it offered and the Club did what it could to meet these demands without alienating the membership which of course had become used to value-for-money prices. It was a sign of the times that some music clubs were starting to fold including Dunstable which was wound up at the end of this season. Luton was given the membership list but contact with the forty or so members produced only three takers. There was equally dismal response from mailshots to other supposedly musical groups.

Chris Thomas was invited to become Chairman of Eastern Arts Festivals Sub-Committee which was to oversee the funding of the various festivals in the Eastern region. Hitherto the festivals had had to apply to the different art form panels according to their programme content. The new committee brought about an overall appraisal system which was much more efficient. Chris remained the chairman until 1994.

THE 1988/89 SEASON

The Club went all Russian this season, presenting a truly comprehensive array of music by Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Mussorgsky, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Schnittke, Rachmaninov, Balakirev, Scriabin, Medtner and several other lesser-known composers. Unfortunately, there were no Russian musicians included apart from the spectacular gipsy folk ensemble Tziganka which lit up the stage with a colourful show of songs and dances. But there were several British artists who had specialised in Russian music, such as the pianists Hamish



Tziganka

Milne, a champion of the music of Nikolai Medtner, Peter Lawson and David Howells; mezzo-soprano Ameral Gunson with bass Mark Wildman and pianist Paul Hamburger who gave all-Russian programme including Mussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death* and the death of Boris scene from the same composer's opera *Boris Godunov*; and the soprano Melanie Armitstead with Martin Isepp at the piano. A further highlight was Jane Manning's ensemble with violinist Elisabeth Perry, cellist and Rostropovich pupil Elizabeth Wilson, pianist Andrew Ball, with Gabriel Woolf returning as reader in a portrait of Shostakovich. Altogether over 50 Russian works were programmed.



Melanie Armitstead

The Frank Bridge series continued into its second season with performances of his Cello Sonata by Alexander Baillie and Ian Brown, the first string quartet by the Hanson Quartet, the second string quartet by the Edinburgh Quartet, and *The Hour Glass* by the aforementioned Bedfordshire-born pianist David Howells. This series continued to have the support of the Frank Bridge Trust.

There was nonetheless, room for plenty of non-Russian music. A major coup was to engage Nicholas Cleobury's cutting edge ensemble Aquarius whose line-up included the brilliant young oboist Nicholas Daniel (clearly going places), clarinettist David Campbell and seven other players in a typical but somewhat uncompromising programme of Britten, Simon Bainbridge, Robin Holloway, Lennox Berkeley and Erik Satie. Another young fast-rising oboist, George Caird, also returned with the Philippa Davies' Albion Ensemble.



Nicholas Cleobury



Philippa Davies

Funding was received from a variety of sources. Apart from Eastern Arts Association, Luton Arts Council and Bedfordshire County Council, grants came from the Ralph Vaughan Williams Trust, the Michael Tippett Musical Foundation, the Frank Bridge Trust, as already mentioned, and the Performing Right Society. Eastern Arts was trying to reduce its grant to the Club and the Chairman, John Thompson, and others were in frequent discussion with the Association's officers about the effect such a penalty would have on music in Luton.

Membership held up reasonably well attaining 174 by March, after a New Year push. Attendances over the 23 concert season averaged 139 with peaks of over 160 for Tziganka and the Cambridge Baroque Camerata. This was a newly-formed period instrument ensemble founded and directed by Jonathan Hellyer Jones. With a programme including two Brandenburg concertos by Bach, two Vivaldi concertos and music by Purcell and Scarlatti, it was little wonder that the concert attracted such a large audience. The concert was sponsored by Computervision Ltd under the Government's Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme. Harpsichords were always a problem for access as already mentioned, but baroque music was popular and the Club felt obliged to include it in the programme each year.



Jonathan Hellyer Jones

The Eastern Arts Regional Contemporary Music Circuit continued and the Club took four programmes, one of which was the Alexander Baillie/Ian Brown recital already mentioned: the programme included Colin Matthews' *Three Enigmas*. The other three programmes were the English Saxophone Quartet; the Prometheus Ensemble, which brought back Elisabeth Perry, Melissa Phelps, Yitkin Seow and Chris Craker to play Beethoven, Shostakovich and Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*; and the Penna Trio (harp, mandolin, guitar) in a pre-Christmas concert which was held in St Mary's Church Hall, as pantomime had begun in the Theatre.



Colin Matthews

Apart from the post-AGM recital given by the piano duet sisters Claire and Antoinette Cann, the season closed magnificently with a return visit from the ever splendid Nash Ensemble of London, playing Mozart, Borodin and Shostakovich. It was by this time a Club policy to programme some really enticing programmes at the start and the end of the season, so as to entice people to subscribe for the current or the following seasons. Having heard the Nash, they couldn't fail to sign up!

THE 1989/90 SEASON



The brochure underwent a major design change this season. It was now fashionable and trendy to avoid straight alignments in print and it was felt that laying out the copy at 45 degree angle would attract new (and younger!) customers. There were some criticisms, of course. People complained that they had to turn their heads on one side to read it! But it continued until 1998. The design incorporated extracts from the score of Stephen Dodgson's *Gipsy Songs* which the Club had commissioned in 1976.

The Frank Bridge series was completed in its third year with Benjamin Frith returning to tackle the Piano Sonata, the Brindisi Quartet



Mayumi Seiler

playing the third string quartet, the Coull Quartet coming back to give the fourth quartet, the Hartley Trio (in which Caroline Clemmow was the pianist) playing the second piano trio and Mayumi Seiler and Caroline Palmer in the Leonardo Piano trio playing the Violin Sonata. Once again the very appreciative Frank Bridge Trust supported this series.

But the main flavour of the season was Hungarian music, mainly Liszt, Kodály and Bartók as well as composers with strong attachments to Hungary such as Haydn and Brahms. As

part of this feature the first three of Bartók's string quartets were programmed, with the remaining three to follow in the next season.

However the Vanbrugh Quartet, which was to have played the third quartet, was unable to appear for some reason, which meant the loss of that work in the series. There were twelve concerts in the series altogether, with artists such



Noriko Ogawa

as the Mistry Quartet and East German Petersen Quartets playing Bartók's first and second quartets respectively, violinist Leland Chen with Ronan O'Hora at the piano, the popular Japanese pianist Noriko Ogawa and the mezzo-soprano Susan Kessler with Graham Johnson.



Leland Chen

The season had opened light-heartedly with Marion Montgomery and Richard Rodney Bennett in their world-renowned show *Fascinatin' Rhythm*, popular songs from Gershwin, Cole Porter, Stephen Sondheim and others. Further gentle fare was provided by piano duet team Jocelyn Abbott and Richard Mapp in a programme of



Richard Rodney Bennett & Marion Montgomery



Prunella Scales

popular pieces by Liszt, Brahms, Debussy and Ravel, culminating in Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals* with Ogden Nash's verses read by Prunella Scales.

Grittier challenges were provided by Jane Manning's new group called Jane's Minstrels, an ensemble of twelve players with conductor formed to present adventurous programmes of British music of different styles and idioms. This Eastern Arts Circuit concert presented works by Maxwell Davies, Richard Rodney Bennett (again!), Thea Musgrave, Alison Bauld, Roger Quilter and Judith Weir. Another concert from Eastern Arts Circuit brought a return from pianist William Howard playing more Judith Weir, with



Judith Weir

pieces by George Benjamin and Colin Matthews alongside music by Scriabin and Schubert. And the Endymion Ensemble returned to present a 50th birthday concert for vice-president John McCabe in which John himself joined the group in music by Mozart, Jean Françaix and of course John.



Andrew Manze

Mention should be made too of an Early Music Network concert by The Cambridge Musick, whose line-up included baroque violinist Andrew Manze. Andrew was a Bedford boy who went on to great things musically and returned to Luton several times. Another first was the appearance of a young Peter Bussereau leading his first string quartet; he of course was destined to become a great friend and regular contributor to Luton's programmes with his chamber orchestra, the Symphonia Academica.

New seats were installed in the theatre around this time, with a steeper rake than before and therefore better sightlines and with a central aisle rather than the two side aisles. The number of seats was now 238. Other improvements were made to front-of-house facilities including moving the bar to its present position.

The membership reached 171 although the average attendance was only 130. A new arts programme, TABS, on BBC Radio Bedfordshire (later Three Counties Radio) compered by Malcolm Singer regularly featured the Music Club's activities, including bi-annual interviews with Chris Thomas about the forthcoming concerts.

THE 1990/91 SEASON

The Bartók string quartet series was completed by three ensembles new to Luton. The highly impressive New Budapest Quartet played the sixth quartet along with Mozart and Beethoven, while the Duke and the Auriol quartets played the fifth and fourth respectively in both cases combining with Mozart and Schubert. All three ensembles were to return to Luton.

The fact that all three played Mozart as well was due to the fact that this season launched a highly ambitious plan to mark the bicentenary of Mozart's death by programming over three seasons all the principal chamber and instrumental works from the last ten years of his life – almost fifty works in all. In this first season of the tribute eighteen works were programmed in ten concerts given among others by the Gagliano String Trio, the London Fortepiano Trio, the Delmé Quartet, the Gaudier Ensemble, and pianists Bernard Roberts and Angela Hewitt.



Canadian talent in Luton: Angela Hewitt, James Campbell and Sophie Rolland

Angela Hewitt was one of a trio of Canadian musicians who, fortuitously or otherwise, were invited to Luton, the other two being the clarinetist James Campbell with John York at the piano, and cellist Sophie Rolland with Colin Stone. Sensing a funding opportunity, the Club approached some Canadian Banks and the Canadian High Commission for financial support. The Royal Bank of Canada offered £100 and the High Commission £200. The latter was largely due to Chris Thomas leaning heavily on the Canadian Cultural Attaché at his London flat.

The centenary of the birth of Arthur Bliss was also marked with performances of six works in three concerts. The Delmé Quartet played his first string quartet, and Rivka Golani and Antony Saunders



Sir Arthur Bliss



Rivka Golani

offered the Viola Sonata. Most enterprisingly, the Manson Ensemble, the Royal Academy of Music's contemporary music ensemble was commissioned to prepare a programme comprising four of Bliss's mixed early mixed instrumental pieces – *Madam Noy*, *Conversations*, *The Women of Yueh* and *Rout* – and with Walton's perennially popular

entertainment *Façade* in the second half. In the latter Michael Berkeley shared the recitation of the Sitwell poems with soprano Linda Hirst. The conductor was Nicholas Cleobury. This was the first of several collaborations with the Manson Ensemble, whose directors were always happy to accommodate requests for specific programmes and works. The low student fees also meant that large-scale works could be considered without breaking the budget!

The season had started in fine style with John Georgiadis' London Viennese Ensemble in a joint promotion with Luton Recreation Services Department as part of what was called the Luton Autumn Spectacular. It turned out to be a one-and-only event. Equally lighthearted was the double bill offered by the company Opera Restor'd which specialised in early opera presented in authentic style of settings, costumes and even gestures. In an Early Music Network tour they gave hilariously entertaining performances of Pergolesi's *La serva padrona* and *The Ephesian Matron* by Charles Dibdin, best known for the immortal songs *The Bells of Aberdovey* and *Tom Bowling*.

Among some stunning soloists were the Russian violinist Rimma Sushanskaya with James Walker at the piano, Welsh harpist Ieuan Jones and pianist Lucy Parham, the latter two artists both returning often and becoming good friends of the Club.



Rimma Sushanskaya



Ieuan Jones



Lucy Parham

The tradition of presenting a short recital following the AGM was stopped as it was felt to be unfair to young artists to have to wait so long between rehearsal and performance. Many of the artists the Club had engaged for

this purpose had been winners of the NFMS Award for Young Concert Artists and indeed soon after the Club ceased the practice the NFMS itself wrote to music clubs to deter them from using young musicians in this way, feeling that they deserved a full length recital.

The Club had received funding from the Performing Right Society for some time but now the PRS established a more formal and competitive opportunity in the form of Enterprise Awards. Luton won the first of many such awards in 1990. They were presented formally at a reception and buffet lunch at the PRS headquarters in Berners Street, London, and John Thompson and Chris Thomas invariably went to collect the certificate and cheque from various notable guests invited for the purpose. John and Chris took it in turns each year to receive the prize. Along with a handful of other promoters, Luton became regular recipients of this prestigious award.

In June 1990 John Thompson joined the NFMS Music Clubs Working Party, set up to further the interests of the Federation's concert promoter members who, it was often felt, were often overshadowed by the far more numerous amateur choirs and orchestras. The Working Party developed into the Concert Promoters' Group and became responsible for establishing the network of selected artists offered to the music clubs each season at discounted fees. Chris Thomas later joined the Working Party and devised the first of such schemes.

The membership figure is lost but the average attendance was 135, a slight increase on the previous season.

THE 1991/92 SEASON

The 45th season was marked by a joint commission with Peterborough Music Club of a piece for piano and wind quintet by the Anglo-Indian composer John Mayer. Entitled *Kriti* the piece had an optional part for tanbura (or tampura), a kind of long-necked Indian lute. It was performed by the Elysian Wind Quintet with Anthony Goldstone on piano and John Mayer himself playing the tanbura. It was not a very impressive piece and, contrary to its usual policy regarding its commissions, the Club never sought to arrange a second performance. The commission was funded by Eastern Arts Board.



John Mayer



The Dufay Collective

The English Dancing Master, a costumed show of dance, music and song recreating the world of Restoration England with music by the likes of Purcell, Lawes, Campra and Lully and readings from the diaries of Pepys and Evelyn; and third, by another costumed entertainment marking the 250th anniversary of the death of Vivaldi. This was given by the Pietá String Ensemble with soprano Lynda Russell and flautist Philippa Davies and with Gabriel Woolf providing suitable readings. The show was generously sponsored by Vauxhall Motors which also supported a pre-Christmas gig by the 1920s jazz band, the Sloane Square Syncopators, a real let-your-hair-down evening.

Three up-and-coming pianists gave memorable recitals. Jonathan Plowright, returning soon after his impressive Luton debut, Nigel Hill and Andrew Zolinsky.



Ann Mackay



Laurent Korcia

The Mozart series continued into its second season with no less than seventeen works in thirteen concerts given by, among others, the Vanbrugh, Delmé, Kreutzer and McCapra string quartets, the glamorous soprano Ann Mackay with pianist John Constable, the charismatic French violinist Laurent Korcia with Tom Blach at the piano, the Raphael ensemble, the London Chamber Soloists led by violinist Madeleine Mitchell and Capricorn in a welcome return visit.



Carlos Bonell

More exoticism came from the Carlos Bonell Ensemble in a lively programme *From Venice to the Andes*, featuring another instrument rarely heard in Club concerts – the panpipes; and from an Early Music Network offering, *Musica Petropolitana*, a Russian baroque costumed ensemble on their first UK tour, playing some pretty obscure music from 18th century St Petersburg. Just as exotic was another Early Music Network concert given by the vibrant Dufay Collective in a programme of 13th century Spanish music from the Court of King Alfonso X of Castile and Leon.

More early music was provided in three other concerts. First, a return from Jonathan Hellyer Jones' Cambridge Baroque Camerata with Bedford star violinist Andrew Manze in a programme which included Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*; second, by the Companie of Dansers which gave an entertainment entitled

Funding was again a mixed bag: apart from the usual sources – Eastern Arts, Luton Arts Council and Bedfordshire County Council – grants were received from the Ralph Vaughan Williams Trust, the Musicians' Union, the Bliss Trust (for performances of the composer's clarinet quintet by Capricorn and second string quartet by the Delmé Quartet), and the Performing Right Society, in the Club's second Enterprise Award. The Musicians' Union grant depended on how many of the artists engaged belonged to the Union and the Club had to go to the trouble of checking this with the musicians. This support, begun in 1989, continued off and on until 2001. The PRS Award depended on how much contemporary music was performed: obviously the commission from John Mayer helped the cause but audiences also heard music by Malcolm Arnold, Sally Beamish, Michael Berkeley (the third performance at the Club of the LMC commission, the Piano Trio), Leo Brouwer, Kenneth Leighton, Leonard Salzedo, Robert Simpson and Bernard Stevens not to mention George Crumb, Ligeti and Schnittke.

Membership was maintained at a healthy 180 while average attendances rose to 151, boosted by some high turnouts for popular concerts such as the Vivaldi entertainment, Carlos Bonell and Jonathan Plowright. It was heartening to learn that the Club's 64% capacity compared very favourably with 63% for amateur theatre, 37% for films, 39% for professional theatre and 39% for other live music. But the Club had to work hard to maintain this level of interest and was constantly on the alert for new marketing initiatives and publicity drives. Pre-season exhibitions in libraries and elsewhere, press coverage, local radio broadcasts, the professional-looking brochure all contributed to getting the Club's work better known in the town and district, but it was always accepted that word of mouth was the best form of publicity. Members were always being pressed to talk to friends and neighbours!

THE 1992/93 SEASON

The Club now reached its 1500th programme – an impressive landmark. To mark the occasion Chris Thomas devised a special celebratory concert featuring soprano Christine Bunning, violinist Janet Masters, cellist Martin Thomas, pianist Caroline Clemmow and piano duet team June Moore and Gerhart Hamburger. The programme was essentially light-hearted. It kicked off with Antony Hopkins' *Variations on a well-known theme* (aka *Happy Birthday*) played by Caroline, who was then joined by Janet to play three popular violin favourites by Kreisler. Christine then sang Satie's *La Diva de l'Empire* and Poulenc's *Les chemins de l'amour* and *Fêtes galantes*. Martin's solos were Fauré's *Elégie* and Saint-Saëns' *Allegro Appassionato*, followed by Christine singing the first professional performance of two songs by Club vice-president Michael Berkeley, *A Cradle Song* and *A Child Asleep*. She also contributed three amusing songs from Sarah Walker's wickedly funny cabaret song book and a couple of Scottish folksong arrangements by Beethoven. June and Gerhart played Malcolm Arnold's *English Dances* arranged for piano duet by Franz Reizenstein and, as the highlight of the evening, a new commission: five variations on an old folksong *I have a bonnet trimmed with blue*, by five composers: Antony Hopkins, Christopher Wiggins, Christopher Brown, John McCabe and Stephen Dodgson. The song was specially selected as reflecting Luton's historic hat trade and one of the last remaining hat manufacturers provided an appropriate hat made for the occasion which Christine wore when she sang the song unaccompanied as a prelude to the piano variations. The composers were paid a small token fee but were happy to salute the Club in this way. The occasion was funded by a generous grant from the Foundation for Sports and the Arts.

The Mozart bicentenary celebration was concluded with a further ten works in ten concerts given by artists such as the Haydn Trio of Vienna, the Paris Arpeggione Quartet with pianist Robin Colvill, the New Budapest, Maggini and Bingham quartets, The Chamber Music Players of London, violinist Lorraine McAslan with Nigel Clayton and three superb pianists: Ian Fountain, Graham Scott and Victor Sangiorgio.



Ian Fountain



Lorraine McAslan



Graham Scott

To mark the centenary of the birth of Herbert Howells, three consecutive concerts featured his music. The Maggini Quartet played his *Phantasy* String Quartet, the Pembridge Ensemble offered

the Piano Quartet, and Victoria Soames and Gillian Cracknell played the Clarinet Sonata in the Mühlfeld Ensemble's concert, which also included John McCabe's sonata for clarinet, cello and piano. The Pembridge Ensemble's programme was all-British affair with, apart from the Howells, Finzi's Prelude and Fugue for string trio and, with tenor Lynton Atkinson, two Housman song cycles with piano and strings, Ivor Gurney's *Ludlow and Teme* and Vaughan Williams' *On Wenlock Edge*.

As will have been noticed the Club was always on the look out for lighter programmes especially out of the mainstream classical diet, in the hope of attracting new audiences. Sometimes this worked, sometimes not. But if it appeared to work, those new people seldom came back for anything else. One such experiment this season was the London Chinese Orchestra. It was thought that this might attract some of the many Chinese residents of Luton and appropriate special publicity was devised aimed at that community. No Chinese attended. Maybe they were all too busy running restaurants. The show drew only 129 people of which a mere 14 were single ticket buyers. Another experiment was an unusual ensemble called Orbestra, formed by eight classical musicians in 1989 to record the folk music of various cultures, such as Africa, Colombia, Macedonia, Shetland and Spain. Led by Peter Cowdrey, the group used violin, trombone, bassoon, cello, double bass, clarinet, tarambuka, teppan, mbira and bamboo flute, along with

voice. Again this only drew an audience of 126 of which eight were newcomers. More appealing was Mercury Jazz with soprano Lesley-Jane Rogers in Gershwin, Cole Porter, Bernstein, Jerome Kern, Richard Rodgers and so on. 165 people turned up for this, 38 of them coming just for this show.

A very special event was a celebration in music and poetry of the life of Sir Lennox Berkeley. Devised by his son Michael, *The Berkeley Inheritance* presented baritone Henry Herford, oboist Nicholas Daniel, pianist Julius Drake with Michael himself as reader, in a concert of music by both Berkeleys, Poulenc and Fauré. Other composers to visit the Club included David Matthews, whose *Aria* for violin and piano was played by Lorraine McAslan and Nigel Clayton, and Jenni Roditi whose *Hay in the Sky* was given its first performance by the clarinet quartet No Strings Attached.



Julius Drake



Jenni Roditi



David Matthews

Membership was maintained at the previous season's level (180) but the average attendance fell to 137. Funding continued to be a time-consuming and often unrewarding task but this season there were

generous contributions from the Holst Foundation, the RVW Trust and the Foundation for Sports and the Arts, apart from the Club's usual funders. Once again the PRS saw fit to bestow yet another Enterprise Award on Luton, recognising its sterling effort in promoting the work of living British composers. Chris Thomas received the award from Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, President of the NFMS.



THE 1993/94 SEASON

There was no particular theme in the 46th season apart from a brief nod to Tchaikovsky to mark the centenary of his death. This comprised the Franz Schubert Quartet of Vienna playing his rarely-



Janis Kelly



Iain Burnside

heard second string quartet, the Raphael Ensemble back again with the string sextet *Souvenir de Florence* and soprano Janis Kelly, bass-baritone Patrick Donnelly and pianist Iain Burnside in a centenary portrait in words and music.

More vocal music came from Vivien Tierney and Donald Maxwell in *A Night at the Opera* and from no less than four early music groups. Notable among these was Janiculum, directed by harpsichordist Jane Clark, wife of Club vice-president Stephen Dodgson, who was able to persuade two of her 'lovely tenors' – Adrian Thompson



Adrian Thompson



Sirinu

and Alasdair Elliott - to take part in a programme of 17th and 18th century Venetian music; Sirinu in an Early Music Network concert featuring more Italian music, this time from the 15th century; and the Castalian Band which gave a recreation of a musical evening in 18th century Scotland. And more early music came from the highly prestigious group, the

Florilegium Chamber Ensemble, led by Ashley Solomon and featuring some of the finest baroque players in Britain at the time.



Ashley Solomon

Jane Clark also visited Luton with Stephen Dodgson when the Club mounted a 70th birthday concert for him. The musicians were Nicholas Daniel's Haffner Wind Ensemble playing music of Stephen's choice by Nielsen, Farkas, Danzi and, of course, Stephen himself. This included his Sonata for wind quintet and a piece for quintet and narrators. *The Old Cigarette Lighter* was based on the Hans Andersen tale *The Old Tinder Box* and the text was by David Reynolds, brother of the Club President Antony Hopkins, who had been born Antony Reynolds. Antony himself had originally wanted to narrate the words but found that a new conducting post conflicted with the concert and he had to

withdraw. The husband-and-wife actors Robert McBain and Maggie Henderson gallantly stepped into the breach.



Joanna MacGregor

Among the pianists were Joanna MacGregor in her first visit to the Club, the young James Kirby, winner of the 1992 NFMS Award for Young Concert Artists, now sponsored by Esso, and the charismatic Rolf Hind who gave a stunning programme of American music including Charles Griffes' Sonata, Stravinsky's *Piano Rag Music*, William Bolcom's *Sea Biscuits Rag*, William Albright's *Piano a Gogo*, Scott Joplin's *Elite Syncopations*, George Benjamin's *Relativity Rag*, Charles Ives' *Three Page Sonata*, Elliott Carter's Sonata & Frederick Rzewski's *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*. Around 160 people turned out to hear that! Rolf was very much a contemporary music specialist and we later heard that he would only condescend to play at two British music clubs – Bromsgrove and Luton – because only they had enlightened programme policies regarded modern music!



James Kirby



Rolf Hind

The opening concert was to have been given by Marisa Robles, in a programme celebrating her 50 years as a performer. However, around 5pm that day she pulled out giving no particular reason. Her agent managed to get the harpist Ieuan Jones to stand in for Miss Robles at the last minute. He arrived at the theatre with half an hour to spare and in that time devised a programme for the first half of the concert. In the interval he worked out what he was going to play in the second half. Another last minute change was caused by the cellist Roham de Saram who was due to play with pianist Yitkin Seow. Rohan had trouble co-ordinating his diaries and found, almost at the last

minute, that he had engagements in Italy on the Sunday before and the Tuesday after he was due to play in Luton, and that there was no way that he could get back to England and then return to Italy in time. Hurriedly, cellist Tim Hugh and pianist Noriko Ogawa were booked instead.



Tim Hugh



Tasmin Little

Another star string player was Tasmin Little who gave her one and only recital at the Club with pianist Piers Lane. They gave the first UK performance of a piece by Dominic Muldowney called *The Anatomy Lesson*.

Membership remained reasonably steady at 161 but the average attendance rose to 154. In late 1993 Chris Thomas was appointed to the

Board of the NFMS: he resigned after two years due to increasing workload. However in 1994 he became Chairman of the Eastern Region of NFMS, a post he held for the statutory nine years; thereafter he stayed on the Eastern Committee as vice-chairman for a further five years.

THE 1994/95 SEASON

The 150th anniversary of the birth of Gabriel Fauré was marked by a series of six concerts featuring chamber music, piano music and songs. Those taking part included pianist Roy Howat, the Dussek Piano Quintet, soprano Julia Gooding and tenor Richard Edgar Wilson with pianist Andrew Ball,



Lucy Jeal



Skampa String Quartet

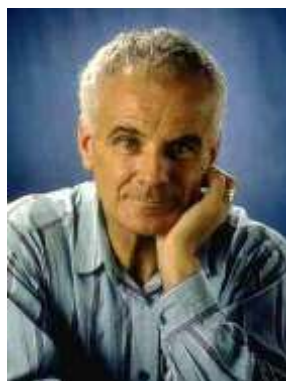
the young violinist Lucy Jeal with Tom Blach at the piano, the Parnassus Ensemble of London, and the Parisii Quartet from France.

The Parisii Quartet was one of several visitors from abroad. The Vienna Piano Trio made a welcome return with

support once again from the Austrian Institute. The Zagreb Guitar Trio brought some rare repertoire, while the Škampa Quartet from Prague made its first appearance at the Club. The Hertz Piano Trio from Canada returned with a concert sponsored by the Canadian High Commission, and a programme of traditional Christmas music from Piedmont was given by the Ensemble del Doppio Bordone playing hurdy-gurdy, bagpipe, melodeon, flute and violin. This concert was a pre-Christmas treat presented in the Library's lending area and supported by Bedfordshire Leisure Services.



Ian Mitchell



Sir Peter Maxwell Davies

A major new development was the introduction of educational events in association with the Luton Music Service. These normally took the form of workshops or children's concerts in schools but occasionally they involved active participation by young people in the Club's concerts. The first event was a workshop given by The City Waites at Southfields Junior School but the second was a very special project by the ensemble Gemini, directed by



Philip Grange

clarinetist Ian Mitchell. This was a concert given a number of times around the country to mark the 60th birthday of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, President of the NFMS. The central work was Max's *Kirkwall Shopping Songs* to be prepared by a local school. In Luton's case the school was Someries Junior. It was an enormous amount of effort on the children's part to prepare for public performance a work which was highly sophisticated compared with what they had been used to. The concert also included two other works by Max and a new piece by Philip Grange, a pupil of Max, along with music by Mozart, Haydn and Byrd. The educational events were initially funded by a special grant from Luton Arts Council but later on, when this source dried up, the Music Service took over responsibility for funding the events.

More 20th-century music was provided by the superb vocal group, I Fagiolini, directed by Robert Hollingsworth, specialising in Renaissance and contemporary music. Founded in 1986 they had swiftly risen to become one of the leading vocal ensembles in the world. They soon became too expensive for the Club to re-engage them. An even more enterprising show was presented by the



Shiva Nova

Eurasian fusion ensemble Shiva Nova, directed by composer Priti Paintal. The combination of flute, cello, table, sitar and piano was joined by jazz marimba star Orphy Robinson in a programme that ranged from classical improvisations to Paintal's own extended work *Polygamy*. It was hoped that the concert might attract some of the Asian community but it didn't.

A more light-hearted concert was the Rasumovsky String Quartet in a words-and-music entertainment called *The Sunlight on the Garden* with the distinguished actress Jill Balcon who had been the wife of the poet Cecil Day-

Lewis and mother of the actor Daniel Day-Lewis. The title of the entertainment was that of a poem by Louis MacNeice. Even more light-hearted was a return visit from Richard Rodney Bennett in his one man cabaret show *Nobody Else but Me* – songs by Gershwin, Cole Porter, Noel Coward, Jerome Kern and Bennett himself.



Jill Balcon



Richard Rodney Bennett

In the summer of 1994 the Club computerised its mailing list for the first time, making mailshots a lot easier to manage. The Library made several improvements to access including automatic doors and a ramp for disabled visitors.

Funding was obtained from the Steel Charitable Trust for the first time – a magnificent contribution of £5,000. The Trust has been a regular and loyal supporter of the Club ever since, thanks in part to its particular interest in beneficiaries in Luton and Bedfordshire and no doubt thanks to two notable Bedfordshire residents, John Childs and John Maddox being among the trustees. Mrs Marjorie Steel, who with her husband had created the Trust in 1976, used to attend some of the concerts until her death in 1999.



The Club won its fourth Enterprise Award in a row from the Performing Right Society in conjunction with the NFMS. Chris Thomas received the award from HRH the Duchess of Kent, the Patron of the Federation. It wasn't to be the last such award!

Membership rose slightly to 173. Average attendance for the first ten concerts was 149.

INTERLUDE 4: THE ASSOCIATE YOUNG COMPOSER SCHEME

A major new initiative was begun in 1995, lasting for three seasons. The object of the scheme was to showcase the music of three young and up-and-coming composers chosen for their



Eleanor Alberga



Martin Butler

approachable and varied styles. The composers chosen were Eleanor Alberga, Martin Butler and Adam Gorb. Over thirty of their works were to be programmed over the three year period. The composers came to concerts whenever their other commitments allowed. Alberga, a fine pianist, also took part in two concerts, one with her husband, violinist Thomas Bowes. The project won a BT Innovation Award from the NFMS.

Eleanor Alberga was born in Jamaica and studied at the Royal Academy of Music. She first started writing for the London Contemporary Dance Theatre and later secured commissions from the London Mozart



Adam Gorb

Players, the Maggini Quartet, Lontano and the Bournemouth Sinfonietta. In 1990 she was the first composer to be commissioned for the inaugural Festival of Women in Music. Two years later she was featured alongside Steve Reich and John Adams at the Vale of Glamorgan Festival. Her first large-scale piece was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, commissioned by the Roald Dahl Foundation and first performed by the LPO at the Royal Festival Hall in 1994. Nine of her works were heard in the series.

Martin Butler is well established as an admired and widely-performed composer. He has received numerous commissions from the likes of the Haffner Wind Ensemble, the Bingham Quartet, the London Sinfonietta, the Carl Flesch International Violin Competition, Mecklenburgh Opera, the BBC and the

Cheltenham and Aldeburgh festivals. Twelve of his works were performed in the series.

Adam Gorb began by writing music for theatre, songs and television jingles. In 1987 he started studying with Paul Patterson and began composing more seriously. His music is widely admired for its rhythmic vitality, eclecticism and freshness. Eleven of his works were played in the series.

The series prompted the composer Stephen Dodgson, a vice president of the Club, to write a very appreciative article for *New Notes*, the journal of the Society for the Promotion of New Music. It is worth reproducing in full:

“Once renowned for making hats, Luton in modern times is better known for Vauxhall cars and its airport. But Luton as a *musical* centre? ...surely not! Yet in the world of musical clubs Luton has become a name to conjure with. Other clubs up and down the country are wide-eyed at its ability to host a concert every week with good audiences and a loyal membership to relish wide-ranging programmes, an adventurous choice of performers and a remarkably high proportion of music by living composers thrown in. It is of course not by any means ‘thrown in’. The programmers at Luton are no novices at the job. Relatively unmoved by hype and media pressures, they have programmed by experience, treading carefully and building everything themselves wherever the ground felt firm. You would probably not have asked them 20 years ago if support for living British composers was a central pillar of their policy. And even today a qualified ‘yes’ might be the response.

“Nevertheless, just over a year ago, Luton Music Club felt the confidence to announce an ‘Associate Young Composer Scheme 1995-98’, giving full details of how it planned to bring the initially chosen three – Martin Butler, Eleanor Alberga and Adam Gorb – into its varied programmes over the coming three years. Any lesser time span was felt inadequate in which to get to know them. ‘The essence of the new scheme is the selection of three composers in their thirties and forties whose music is, in our view, likely to appeal to a non-specialist but open-minded audience such as ours’. Notice that Luton was not leaning on some pundit’s advice, but thinking out this selection for itself. And notice too that ‘...the composers will be expected to attend as many of the relevant concerts as their other work permits’, a sign of the mutual benefit envisaged by the scheme.

“The new initiative is in no way a departure from the quietly adventurous path the club has followed for years. It should be seen rather as a part of an evolving process, the new ‘associates’ in effect joining other composers of the immediately previous generation lucky enough to have won the club’s trust so far. But if Luton is the envy of other music clubs, it’s apparent too that it cannot be copied. What it has built arises from its particular circumstance. As an example, however, its message is loud and clear.”



From left to right: Martin Butler, Eleanor Alberga, Antony Hopkins, Adam Gorb and Chris Thomas on stage in St George’s Theatre, Luton, with the BT Innovation Award (the tree!) sitting on the piano (picture reproduced from SPNM’s New Notes)

And Michael Berkeley, another vice-president of the Club, wrote in the annual brochure: “Despite the fantastic aural experiences now available through digital technology, nothing can quite match the sound of live music – the touch of bow on string, the sheer presence of the human voice. That is why a music club like Luton is so precious especially given the remarkably innovative programmes that it never fails to produce. A wonderful wide range of music is offered at affordable prices and musicians know that they will be greeted warmly by a knowledgeable and adventurous audience.”

And audiences were not deterred: for the five concerts in Year 1 the average attendance was 154. The average for all 19 concerts was 150.

THE 1995/96 SEASON

The first season of the Associate Young Composer scheme included six concerts featuring music by the three composers (see previous page). Most of them were return visits by popular artists such as the Bingham Quartet who played Butler's *Songs and Dances from a Haunted Place* along with music by Mozart, Haydn and Schubert, and the Maggini Quartet who played Alberga's first quartet and, with Alberga herself, her short piano quintet, *Clouds*. Ravel's quartet and some solo piano pieces by Debussy completed the programme. Guitarist Craig Ogden, now a winner of the NFMS Award for Young Concert Artists, returned with his wife, the mezzo-soprano Claire Bradshaw, in a programme which included Butler's *Four Shanties* for guitar. Clarinettist David Campbell and pianist Andrew Ball gave a recital in which Bernstein, Debussy, Poulenc and Weber framed no less than five short works by Butler and Alberga. Victoria Soames' Mühlfeld Ensemble presented a programme called *Tango!* which featured two pieces by Gorb. And finally the Haffner Wind Ensemble returned with actors Robert McBain and Maggie Henderson in an entertainment devised by Nick Daniel and Chris Thomas called *Animal Crackers* – Butler's *Dirty Beasts* (with words by Roald Dahl) and wind quintet Down-Hollow Winds, along with works by Roussel, Poulenc (*Babar the Little Elephant*), Ibert and Berio (*Opus Number Zoo*).

Aside from this memorable series, the Club welcomed a number of artists from Europe, among



Vasmalom

them the Werethina String Quartet from Germany, winner of the coveted Menuhin Prize in the 1991 International London String Quartet Competition, three ensembles from Austria: the Chamber Trio Linz-Vienna playing music from the 18th century Court of Vienna, the Helios Trio of flute, cello and piano, both presented in the on-going association with the Austrian Institute, and the Haydn Trio of Vienna, whose concert was designated by the Club as its NFMS Diamond Jubilee concert, marking 60 years of the Federation's remarkable support to amateur musical societies in Britain. There was also a folk music ensemble from Hungary, Vasmalom, the highly impressive



Kocian Quartet of Prague

Kocian String Quartet from Prague, and the very distinguished French pianist Jean-Philippe Collard, who found fault with the piano to such an extent that it was touch and go whether he would continue with his recital. Persuaded that it would be impossible to find a tuner at such a late hour he became professional and gave a memorable concert.



Jean-Philippe Collard

Much better-tempered was the pianist Steven Osborne, on his second visit to Luton but standing in at short notice for the Swedish *wunderkind* Peter Jablonski who was indisposed.

A major collaboration was arranged with the Bedford and Leighton Buzzard music clubs whereby the Barbican Piano Trio with violinist Marcia Crayford (of the Nash Ensemble), cellist Robert Max and pianist James Kirby, who had been to the Club only recently, played all Beethoven's piano trios in three concerts. The clubs' patrons were invited to attend the other concerts in the cycle with the offer of a discount on tickets.



The Musicke Company

Another prizewinning ensemble from 1991 was The Musicke Company – two singers, baroque cello and harpsichord – which was a finalist in the International Early Music Competition. They presented a programme marking the tercentenary of the death of Purcell.

More early music was provided by the ensemble Kithara (voice, lute/guitar, virginals, bass viol) presenting songs, ballads and dance music from 16th century England, Spain and Italy. And the wonderfully charismatic group, The Burning Bush, led by the irrepressible Lucie Skeaping, gave a rip-roaring evening of music from the Jewish tradition.

The Club won yet another Enterprise Award from the Performing Right Society, which was received by John Thompson from Lady Hilary Groves, widow of Sir Charles, at a reception in London.

The Club also received support from several other sources including the Michael Tippett Musical Foundation, the Holst Foundation, John Myatt Woodwind and the Steel Charitable Trust. This local trust has continued to support the Club very generously since this time, with grants between £2000 and £4000. The Trust was established by local businessman Walter Steel and his wife Marjorie Steel in 1976. Most of the grants it disperses are to Bedfordshire organisations. Walter Steel died in 1983 and his wife died in 1999. In her last years she occasionally came to the concerts.



John Thompson and Lady Groves, 26 October 1995

Membership again rose slightly to 176. The average attendance was 155.

THE 1996/97 SEASON

The Golden Jubilee Season was marked by the commissioning of a string sextet called *Pilgrim* from John McCabe, a Vice President of the Club. It was written for the Raphael Ensemble which gave the premiere on 10 February. The commission was funded jointly by Eastern Arts Board and, in a remarkable and enlightened gesture, Bedfordshire County Council. The Council was attracted by the fact that the piece was inspired to some extent by Bedfordshire-born John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and that the Club persuaded the music clubs in Bedford and Leighton Buzzard to host the second and third performances of the work shortly after the premiere.

The Associate Young Composer Scheme continued into its second year with a further six concerts: Eleanor Alberga and her violinist husband Thomas Bowes played her own *The Wild Blue Yonder* and Adam Gorb's *Klezmer* along with music by Bach, Schumann, Falla and Szymanowski; the London Winds quintet gave Gorb's *The Echoing Green* in a very varied programme. The flautist



Philippa Davies



Michael Collins

Philippa Davies and clarinettist Michael Collins gave a tuition workshop at Someries Junior School on the afternoon of the concert.

Local husband-and-wife piano duet team Isabel Beyer and Harvey Dagul returned to play Adam Gorb's *Animal Dances*. This was complemented by some specially commissioned verses by Luton writer Michael Brooks, the result of a competition for the task

organised by Luton Scribblers' Club. The verses were read by Richard Baker in a welcome return visit. He also recited some verses by Frances Button to Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals*. The duo also played *The Luton Variations* which the Club had commissioned for its 1500th programme. Further zoological excursions came from the ensemble Capricorn which played Alberga's *Animal Banter* and Martin Butler's *Small Change*. The trio Tapestry (soprano, clarinet and piano) gave Butler's *Three Emily Dickinson Poems* and the third performance at the Club of vice-president Stephen Dodgson's *Gipsy Songs*, commissioned by the Club in 1976. Finally the Manson Ensemble of the Royal Academy of Music returned to give a programme which included Butler's *Going with the Grain* and Alberga's *Dancing with the Shadow* along with works by Debussy, Ravel, Copland and Johann Strauss arranged by Schoenberg. It is interesting to note two musicians in this student line-up who went on to great things – violinist Benjamin Nabarro and percussionist Colin Currie. The series this season attracted funding from the Michael Tippett Musical Foundation but further offers from the Holst and Hinrichsen foundations had to be declined or postponed because the Club was in danger of receiving too much external funding!

More music from vice-presidents was heard when the Alburni Quartet with oboist Sarah Francis included Dodgson's Oboe Quartet, and pianist Victor Sangiorgio valiantly essayed McCabe's *Study No 5: Paraphrase on Mary Queen of Scots*. And the Club President was not forgotten when the London Opera Players presented Antony Hopkins' *Three's Company* along with Sullivan's *Cox and Box*. The company's visit also included a workshop and performance of Hopkins' opera *Dr Musikus* at South Luton High School.



Marianne Olyver & her Orchestra

were pianist Philip Dyson playing Billy Mayerl, Gershwin and Scott Joplin and two singers and a pianist in songs by Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, Jerome Kern, Ivor Novello and Bernstein.

Another lighter occasion was a words-and-music evening given by Peter Seymour's Yorkshire Baroque Soloists with soprano Yvonne Seymour and reader Gabriel Woolf. This was an entertainment which the Club had cunningly entitled *An Evening in Vauxhall Gardens*: an application for funding to Vauxhall Motors certainly tickled the fancy of the management there, resulting in a cheque for £1790!



Roderick Williams

More singing came from the baritone Roderick Williams who had won the 1995 NFMS Award for Young Concert Artists. With his pianist Susie Allan he gave memorable and impressive performances of Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* (the first time he had attempted this challenging song-cycle), Butterworth's *A Shropshire Lad* and some Fauré *mélodies*. This recital marked the beginning of an enormously impressive career and of a regular association with the Club, whose audiences have relished his superb vocal interpretations and his charismatic stage presence.

A sad note was sounded by the death on 2 January of Fred Fensome who had been involved with the Club as committee member and chairman for nearly fifty years. The Club was clearly his whole life as he seemed to have few other interests. The concert by the Gabrieli String Quartet on 13 January was dedicated to his memory, the programme including Haydn, Beethoven and Samuel Barber's moving *Adagio for Strings*, often heard in memorial circumstances.

Chris Thomas took over from John Thompson as Chairman at the 1997 Annual General Meeting, while continuing to be responsible for programme planning. John remained on the Committee as Funding Manager. The membership increased slightly yet again, up to 181, while the average attendance was 159.

THE 1997/98 SEASON

A major disruption this season was the Council's decision to remove asbestos materials from the Theatre. This resulted in the Club's second half being moved to Stopsley Baptist Church, a large modern venue used by Luton Choral Society and Luton Symphony Orchestra. It was very spacious and had far too many seats for the Club audiences; artists facilities were fine but there was no licensed bar although coffee was laid on. But the Council paid for all extra expenses so that the Club was not out of pocket. This included bringing the Blüthner piano to Stopsley for the duration. However, audience numbers declined markedly as a result of the move which was clearly inconvenient for quite a few people: the average pre-Christmas was 169 whereas the Stopsley figure was 141.



Stopsley Baptist Church

The Associate Young Artist Scheme entered its third and final year. The seven concerts included the Delta Saxophone Quartet which offered Eleanor Alberga's *Glinting Glancing Shards* in a varied programme; clarinettist Robert Plane's trio with viola player Philip Dukes and pianist Sophie Rahman which played Adam Gorb's *Valse-Nocturne* and *Humoresque*; the versatile flute, harp and



Delta Saxophone Quartet



Plane-Dukes-Rahman Trio

string trio ensemble Jeux, which gave more Gorb in his *Liebeslied*; the eminent recorder player John Turner with his Legrand Ensemble playing a piece by Martin Butler; the young Nossek String Quartet tackled Alberga's second quartet; the Bingham String Quartet with

David Campbell playing clarinet quintets by Butler, Mozart and Brahms; and a return from the Manson Chamber Ensemble of the Royal Academy of Music which gave a brave programme including Butler's *Tin-Pan Ballet*, Gorb's very entertaining *Hymns Uproarious* (John Betjamen settings), Constant Lambert's Piano Concerto and Richard Rodney Bennett's *Commedia 1*. This last was billed inspirationally as 'Gorb 'n' Bennett, Lambert and Butler'.

There were several artists from abroad including the string orchestra Camerata Roman of Sweden, the Audubon Quartet from Virginia, USA, the Auer Quartet from Hungary, winners of the 1997 London International String Quartet Competition, and the Jess Piano Trio from Vienna in a further association with the Austrian Cultural Institute. A Russian flavour was also evident in recitals by the



Katya Apekisheva

cellist Leonid Gorokhov with pianist Colin Stone, and Katya Apekisheva, the sixth prizewinner at the 1996 Leeds International Piano Competition. She was booked following a personal invitation to the Club from Fanny Waterman, Director of the Competition, to join the elite group of music clubs entitled to offer engagements to one of the six winners. The Club continued that association for some years. One of the problems here was that few of the competition participants had agents or any kind of representative in this country and the arrangement of a tour was really essential to make a booking worthwhile. Individual clubs would find that difficult and so most promoters selected pianists who did have UK agents.

Entertaining programmes were provided by a return visit by the very popular City Waites led by Lucie Skeaping, by three



Simon Williams



Diana Ambache

members of Diana Ambache's Chamber Ensemble with readers Maggie Henderson and Simon Williams in a programme of music and letters by Felix Mendelssohn and his sister Fanny, and by the Rasumovsky Quartet with actor Jill Balcon in a words-and-music programme about Italy.

The short season at Stopsley ended with a memorable recital by pianist Steven Osborne, then in the early stages of what was to become a meteoric career. As an encore he took off a shoe and played something extraordinary with his foot!

It was about this time that the theatre's name was changed from St George's to the Library Theatre since it was felt that this name, however prosaic it might seem, would at least associate the venue with the Library building in the minds of the public. It has remained the Library Theatre every since.

In November 1997 one of the Club's composer vice-presidents, Robert Simpson, died at his home in Ireland. Since he moved there the Club had inevitably seen little of him. He was mainly known for his magnificent series of fifteen string quartets – indeed he wrote little other chamber music. They were intense, cerebral pieces composed in a conservative tonal idiom but as demanding for the listener as the late quartets of Simpson's beloved Beethoven. Comparatively few ensembles had taken these works into their repertoire and so it was not always easy to programme them. The Delmé Quartet was among the real champions of Simpson's music and played two of the quartets at the Club. The Coull, Vellinger and Vanbrugh quartets also played them, the last performance being No 15 in February 1997, just nine months before Simpson died.

The membership was 183, more or less the same as the previous season.

THE 1998/99 SEASON

Back in the comfort of the Library Theatre the Club opened the season with three stunning and highly popular concerts: a recital by leading international pianist Yonty Solomon in a welcome return visit; the new-on-the-scene Belcea Quartet at the start of a brilliant career; and the vastly entertaining Marianne Olyver and her Orchestra. It was invariably the Club's policy to programme



Marianne Olyver



Oleg Kogan

some irresistible programmes at the start of season, to encourage members to renew and to attract newcomers; and the same at the end of each season to get regulars to sign up for the following season at a discounted rate. The Belcea Quartet had programmed Delius' *Late Swallows* Quartet, along with Haydn and Beethoven. This was one of three concerts in the season featuring works by Delius, the others being the recital by cellist Oleg Kogan and his wife Polina (replacing Benjamin Frith), who played the Cello Sonata, and a programme of French songs by soprano Vanessa Scott

with pianist Timothy Barratt, who included three Verlaine settings by Delius. For these three concerts the Club received a grant of £1000 from the Delius Trust, one of several composer trusts the Club was to use on a regular basis.

The centenary of the birth of Francis Poulenc was marked by performances of 16 works in seven concerts. Among them was a recital by the young Luton oboist Adrian Wilson who had been a finalist in the 1996 and 1998 BBC Young Musician of the Year Competitions and the Helios Trio of Austria who also played the trio for flute, cello and piano *Amo, amas, amat* (*Variations on the Eton Boating Song*) by Richard Sisson, the first time that a work of his had been performed at the Club. Richard was to become much involved in the Club and to eventually take over the programme planning role. The Helios Trio learnt the piece especially for the concert.



Adrian Wilson

The Trio was not the only Austrian ensemble to visit the Club this season, which saw the first of several visits by the Vienna Mozart Trio and the Hugo Wolf Quartet, winners of the 1997 London International String Quartet Competition. Further impressive talent from that part of Europe came from the Kocian



Vienna Mozart Trio



Katona Twins

String Quartet and the Guarneri Piano Trio, both of Prague, and the young Hungarian guitar duo, the twin-brothers Peter and Zoltán Katona.

As already noted, the Club tried wherever possible to programme music by its composer vice-presidents and sought particularly to mark their significant

birthdays with celebratory concerts. Michael Berkeley's 50th birthday in May 1998 was honoured with a concert by the Fine Arts Brass ensemble in which Berkeley's *Music for Chaucer* and *Fantastic Mind* were played, the latter piece including Michael himself as a reciter. And John McCabe's 60th birthday in April 1999 was celebrated in a concert on 22 March by oboist Sarah

Francis and the Tagore String Trio: the programme included McCabe's Oboe Quartet and his String Trio as well as music by Haydn, Mozart and Alan Rawsthorne, a special enthusiasm of McCabe, who has written a book on the composer. The Oboe Quartet was one of the first pieces of Rawsthorne's music that had been heard at the Club, which received a grant of £300 from the Rawsthorne Trust.



Margaret Fingerhut



Andrew Wilde

Among the other attractions were pianists Margaret Fingerhut and Andrew Wilde, the first appearance in Luton of the theatrical early music group Red Priest led by ace recorder virtuoso Piers Adams, and as a pre-Christmas show, Simon Mayor's Mandolin Quartet.

Educational events continued as usual. Until 1998 these had been funded by the Club with a special grant from Luton Arts Council. When this ceased in 1998 the Luton Music Service took over funding of the events. They were also responsible for finding the schools in which to place the events. The

Club worked very closely with the Music Service and for a time appointed a Schools Liaison Officer on the committee. In the 1998/99 season there were seven events, all linked to concerts, which the young people taking part in the school events were encouraged to attend – with mixed results! Most of the events took the form of hands-on workshops or music appreciation concerts but they occasionally involved actual participation in the evening concerts at the Theatre. This season for



Red Priest

instance several young people took part in a performance of an Adam Gorb piece in Marianne Olyver's concert.

A sad note was struck early in 1999 when Richard Hopkins, CBE, died aged 88. Richard was a founder member of the Club and served on the committee for several years. He also contributed enormously to the early years of the Club by giving talks on a wide variety of musical topics. His knowledge of music was very wide and his enthusiasm for the Club continued until his last days. He had been Personnel Manager at Vauxhall Motors which in the early days after the war had its own music club. A concert in 2000 was dedicated to his memory.



Simon Mayor's Mandolin Quartet

The membership remained steady at 184 while the average attendance was 160.

THE 1999/2000 SEASON

A major innovation was a five-concert *Classical Pops* Series aimed at bringing in new audiences. A separate subscription for the five concerts brought in 24 extra 'regulars'. The concerts were given by the London String Soloists (an expanded Bingham String Quartet effectively), pianist Martino Tirimo, the percussion ensemble Classic Rhythm, the Tetra Guitar Quartet and the piano duo Anthony Goldstone and Caroline Clemmow. The repertoire in all these programmes comprised really popular pieces ('Your Hundred Best Tunes!'). To start with the initiative was a remarkable success, achieving an average attendance of 193. But when the project was repeated the following season the average fell to 155, probably due to a less attractive choice of programmes. After that it was discontinued.

But 'pops' were not the only way of attracting more people who were often drawn by well-known names or foreign artists. So a pianist like Jeremy Menuhin brought in 198, the St Petersburg String Quartet drew 185 and Peter Katin's piano trio attracted 174. More remarkable still was the young Dominic Seldis with pianist James Pearson in *The Incredible Christmas Double Bass Show* which for some reason had 185 people rushing to get in.



Crowd pullers: Jeremy Menuhin, Peter Katin's Piano Trio, Dominic Seldis

Funding, of course, was normally a matter of application by the promoter rather than the other way round. So the Committee was taken aback by a totally unprovoked offer of a £5000 grant by the Britten-Pears Foundation in recognition of the Club's work for contemporary music in recent years. It was later realised that one of the Foundation's trustees was Michael Berkeley, a vice-president and great supporter of the Club, who had suggested that smaller promoters were just as worthy of financial help as performers and festivals. The Foundation stipulated that the grant should be spent on just two major events rather than the whole season. Two programmes were therefore devised: in the first the Manson Ensemble of the Royal Academy of Music was invited back with soprano Gillian Keith and conductor Edward Gardner to play the Octet by Howard Ferguson (who had died in 1999), Nicholas Maw's *La vita nuova*, and serenades by Jean Françaix and Robin Holloway. The second concert was given by The Nash Ensemble and included music by Malcolm Arnold, Robin Holloway, Herbert Howells, David Matthews and Arnold Bax.



Three distinguished composers: Howard Ferguson, Nicholas Maw & Robin Holloway

Seven educational events were arranged, chief among which was a performance of Humperdinck's opera *Hansel and Gretel* by the London Opera Players in which 29 children from Five Oaks Middle School, Caddington, took part in singing and dancing roles. This was added at the end of the season to the programme at the Library Theatre and a second performance was given at the school the following day. This project was funded by an *Awards for All* Lottery grant of almost £5000.

Apart from the St Petersburg Quartet, the Club also welcomed several other artists from abroad. These included the Ludwig String Quartet from Paris, the Armenian cellist Alexander Chaushian, the Vienna Brahms Trio and the Russian pianist Elizaveta Kopelman, all of whom enthralled large audiences.



Alexander Chaushian



Elizaveta Kopelman

The Club seemed to have been awash with external funding this season – over £14,000 – including another grant from the Delius Trust for a performance by Priya Mitchell and Andrew West of the composer's early violin sonata. But this was not all: the late Richard Hopkins left a bequest of almost £1400 which the Club put towards a concert by Paul Barritt's string quintet *Divertimenti* in

Richard's memory. It included a performance of the rarely heard Quintet by Dame Ethel Smyth, whose music Richard had urged the Club to explore.

It was remarkable how few times artists withdrew from concerts: normally it was far enough ahead and for good reasons but occasionally there were annoying and abrupt terminations such as the planned recital by soprano Emma Bell. When another, more prestigious date came up she had no hesitation in withdrawing peremptorily from the Luton engagement at short notice. Admittedly she went on to a very successful career at leading opera houses but her agent should have put her right about manners! In the event the Club managed to secure the services of soprano Evelyn Tubb with guitarist Michael Fields in a delightful programme entitled *Plaisir d'amour*.



Priya Mitchell



Evelyn Tubb & Michael Fields

Membership increased to 210 but this included the extra subscribers for the Classical Pops series. Average attendance was 166.

THE 2000/01 SEASON

Compared with the steady membership and attendance figures in recent seasons, this season showed a dramatic fall in numbers, with 172 subscribers (a fall of 38) and an average turnout of 145, a fall of 21. The atrocious weather that prevailed during the season may have had a lot to do with it, but there must have been other factors. The wet weather actually caused one concert to be cancelled. This was meant to be a recital by the rising young Georgian violinist Elisabeth Batiashvili and pianist Yumiko Urabe. However, severe flooding in the south of England prevented her from leaving Lewes where she had played the night before. It was too late to arrange an alternative artist.

As already noted the Classical Pops series was not nearly as successful as in the previous season. The artists were the Cambridge Baroque Camerata, the male voice close harmony group Cantabile, an entertainment by Café Mozart evoking music from the Viennese coffee houses of the 18th century, the Marais Ensemble (wind quintet) and John Lenehan's Joachim Piano Trio playing Beethoven's *Archduke* Trio among other works. All programmes were again full of very popular repertoire and so it was a mystery why the initiative was not so successful this time.



Cantabile



John Lenehan

No less than seven concerts had educational events attached to them or involved active participation by music students. One of these was linked to the Luton residency of the Britten Sinfonia organised by Luton Borough Council. The residency started in 2001 and involved an annual concert at Stopsley Baptist Church and a good deal of working with schools. The residency continued for a few years but in the end had to be abandoned for financial reasons. The Stopsley programmes were not that popular due to their somewhat uncompromising programming. The



Lucy Wakeford

spin-off concert for the Club involved three players: oboist Nicholas Daniel, harpist Lucy Wakeford and cellist Caroline Dearnley. It included the results of an educational project led by Richard Sisson, in which some young Luton music students wrote variations on a theme by Howard Goodall, *All in the Garden Green*. Five of these pieces were performed in the evening concert which also included the premiere of Richard's own set of variations on the same theme, including a part for narrator, taken by Kevin Moore. The project won for Richard a Year of the Artist Award from East England Arts.

A major celebration was the 80th birthday of the Club's President, Antony Hopkins, who had held the post since 1959. Chris Thomas went to see him at his home in Ashridge to discuss a possible programme. Chris was surprised to find a whole pile of music and it was Antony's clear intention to have the whole concert

devoted to his own music, rather than about half of it, as the Committee had thought. Moreover, one of the pieces Antony proposed was a cantata for soprano and female choir called *Early One Morning*, which had been written to mark an anniversary of the National Federation of Women's Institutes! In the event the Luton Music Service was approached and agreed to prepare the piece with the Luton Youth Choir and an instrumental ensemble of music students. Antony was to

conduct it. He had also suggested three soloists for this and other works: Kate Semmens to be the soprano in the cantata, the violinist Siân Philipps and the pianist Chenyin Li.



Chenyin Li, Siân Philipps and Kate Semmens honouring Antony Hopkins' 80th Birthday

Some distinguished artists graced the roster of performers including pianists Bernard Roberts and Noriko Ogawa, the Janáček and Aurn String Quartets from the Czech Republic and Germany. But, as ever, superb younger artists were enlivening Mondays on a regular basis. By this time the Club was often using the prestigious Young Concert Artists Trust which annually creamed off the very best in young promising talent and offered them to promoters at very reasonable fees. This was a way for the Club to choose artists of undoubted calibre. This season for instance the cellist Liwei Qin was chosen. The Club also continued to patronise the National Federation of Music



Promoting the best in young talent: Liwei Qin and Donna Bateman

Societies' Award for Young Concert Artists and this season brought the delightfully engaging soprano Donna Bateman to the Theatre.

As a result of the falling level of support, the Club circulated a questionnaire to subscribers seeking their views about the Club and in particular the programmes. Just over 60% responded confirming that there was

considerable satisfaction with the choice of artists and music and the number of concerts, although it was clear that quite a number did not like early or contemporary music all that much. Subscribers also recognised that subscriptions normally had to rise each year. And so there was no mandate for any significant changes except for the idea of abolishing the senior citizen discount subscription rate as from 2002/03.

John Thompson stood down from the Committee after 54 years of almost continual service to the Club and was made a vice-president.

INTERLUDE 5: THE LUTON FINZI FESTIVAL

A major initiative in the 2001/02 season was a festival celebrating the centenary of the birth of composer Gerald Finzi. Suggested by the Music Club, the festival involved all the other musical organisations in Luton mounting performances of Finzi's works from October 14 to December 1, ten events in all. The festival was supported by an *Awards for All* Lottery grant. Another funding application, to the Finzi Trust, was turned down much to everyone's surprise, the reason given being that, in the centenary year, the Trust had received so many demands on its limited funds. Because of the extensive involvement of youngsters in the festival, as performers, composers and listeners, it was also designated a flagship project for the Making Music Eastern Region's Young People's Programme. The young people's involvement was coordinated by the Luton Music Service. Youth organisations took part in some concerts, several school workshops were undertaken, and an extensive composing project was planned by Richard Sisson and animateur Lee Stanley. The Britten Sinfonia Community and Education Programme, part of their Luton residency, worked in a junior school and a special school in the town, to create a new piece of music, influenced by Finzi, for performance in the Festival.



Gerald Finzi

Finzi's main interest was in vocal music, both choral and song, with a handful of orchestral pieces and an even smaller quantity of chamber music. Nonetheless this variety enabled the various Luton organisations to find something to contribute.

The Festival was launched with a well-attended morning service in Luton Parish Church on 14 October in which a special Festival Choir sang Finzi's anthem *God is gone up* and the part-song *My Spirit sang all Day*. The concerts began a week later with a concert at the Vauxhall Recreation Centre by the Symphonia Academica, a professional chamber orchestra with a residency at the University of Luton (later Bedfordshire) since 1999. The concert, directed by its leader Peter Bussereau, played Finzi's Clarinet Concerto with Julie Beaman as soloist, along with music by Elgar, Warlock and Purcell. The following season the Symphonia began an association with the Music Club where they were annually included in its concert season.

Three weeks later, the Britten Sinfonia concert at Stopsley Baptist Church, conducted by Nicholas Cleobury, included Finzi's *Dies natalis* and *Farewell to Arms* with tenor James Oxley, along with music for strings by Elgar and Richard Strauss.

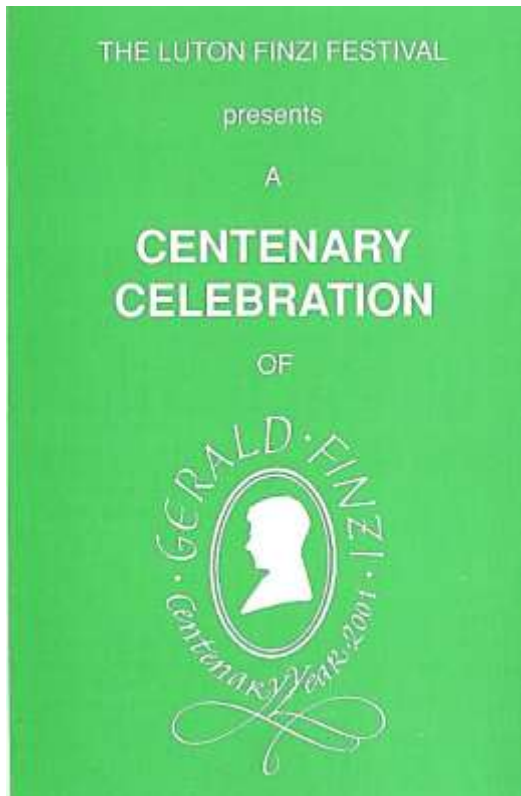
On 17 November Luton Youth Orchestra and Luton University Choir, under the direction of Chris Pascoe, gave their contribution in the Parish Church. The Finzi piece was *The Fall of the Leaf* and the rest of the programme included Butterworth's *The Banks of Green Willow*, Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* March No 4, Eric Coates *Dam Busters March* and the first performance of a new work by the head of Luton Music Service, Stephen Beaven.

The following week it was the turn of the Luton Choral Society which was joined by Luton and Bedfordshire school choirs and the Chiltern Symphony Orchestra at Stopsley again, with conductor Julian Mann and tenor Garth Bardsley, tackling Finzi's major work *Intimations of Immortality* along with Holst's *Hymn of Jesus*.

On 1 December at Stopsley Baptist Church, Luton Symphony Orchestra under their conductor Uwe Radok played Finzi's Violin Concerto with Peter Bussereau as soloist, coupled with Fauré's *Masques et bergamasques* and Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony.

The Music Club made four contributions on successive Mondays in November. First off were the London String Soloists in a programme of baroque and English Romantic music by Frank Bridge, John Ireland, Percy Grainger and of course Finzi, whose short pieces *Romance* and *Prelude* concluded the concert. Then came a return visit from clarinettist Angus Meryon with pianist Samantha Newbold, playing Finzi's *Five Bagatelles*, and music by Debussy, Brahms, Joseph Horowitz, Lovreglio and Martin Butler, who had been one of the Club's Associate Young Composers a few years earlier.

The third concert was given by the outstanding ensemble Chamber Domaine, directed by Thomas Kemp, in a programme of music for string trio including Finzi's *Prelude and Fugue* and the trio by



Michael Berkeley, a vice-president of the Club, as well as works by Bach/Mozart, Schubert and Beethoven. The trio also played the first performance of a new piece by Daniel Basford, a Luton music student, written as part of Richard Sisson's composition project. The final concert was a welcome return from baritone Roderick Williams with pianist Nigel Foster, singing Finzi's song cycle *Before and after summer*, songs by Quilter, Ireland, Bax and Butterworth, and *So heavy hangs the sky*, some new Housman settings by Richard Sisson. Also included were two songs written by Luton music students as part of the aforementioned composition project.

A leading objective of the Festival was to encourage the audiences of the participating organisations to attend other societies' concerts. This aim had very limited success, it has to be said. But the project did nurture collaboration between the various musical organisations and led to the formation of the Luton Classical Music Network in 2003.

THE 2001/02 SEASON

The other major feature of this season was a seven-concert celebration of the music of Sir William Walton to mark the centenary of his birth on 29 March 2002. In fact the seven concerts were spread over two seasons, with four in 2001/02 and the remaining three in the following autumn. The first four were financially supported by the Britten-Pears Foundation.



Sir William Walton OM

The celebration opened with a return visit from Paul Barritt's string quintet Divertimenti with violinist Susanne Stanzeleit and pianist Julian Jacobson who played the Violin Sonata, the Toccata and two short pieces – Canzonetta and Scherzo – together with sonatas by Mozart and Brahms. The third concert was given by tenor Martyn Hill with Australian guitarist Craig Ogden, who was to become a real favourite with Luton audiences. Their all-British programme included Walton's *Anon in Love* and Five Bagatelles for solo guitar, plus Tippett's *The Blue Guitar* and *Songs for Achilles*, Britten's *Songs from the Chinese*, and three songs by Purcell. Despite Craig's popularity, such an esoteric programme drew only 98 people, a low figure at that time. Then came the Holywell Ensemble playing Walton's Piano Quartet, with music by Beethoven, Ireland and Dohnányi.



Martyn Hill



Julian Jacobson & Susanne Stanzeleit



Craig Ogden

International artists continued to feature from time to time. The Romanian ConTempo Quartet, who won third and Audience prizes at the 2000 London International String Quartet Competition came in October, followed by the Danel String Quartet from France and Belgium in February. Lastly in March the Vienna Mozart Trio made a welcome return. Artists from abroad often had to be put up for the night which was not always convenient or easy, especially for, say, four musicians each wanting a separate bedroom. And if the artists were dependent on public transport, as was often the case, they had to be taken the following morning to a railway station or airport, sometimes at very early times. On the other hand the musicians were invariably a pleasure to entertain and delighted to find themselves in hospitable private homes with a late-night supper and a bottle (or two!) of wine. Being close to London the Club was not often called upon to host overnight stays, unlike music clubs in more distant parts of the country who were used to it. British artists sometimes wanted to stay the night as well, if they lived some way from Bedfordshire. But equally it was remarkable how often musicians would journey home for over 100 miles after a concert, usually because they had another commitment – such as teaching – the following morning.

Some artists lived much closer to home, like the very talented Wood sisters – oboist Katharine, violinist Helena and cellist Rebecca – who hailed from Harpenden. Each of them at different times had reached the national finals of the BBC Young Musician of the Year Competition and went on to have very successful careers. They attracted quite a number of local fans to their concert, of course, but these supporters rarely returned to hear anything else – sadly a common phenomenon!

Slightly more experienced young talent was represented by the Anglo-Swedish Kungsbacka Piano Trio, just taken on by the Young Concert Artists Trust, and two highly impressive pianists – both



Ashley Wass



Viv McLean

true masters of the keyboard: Ashley Wass, who had been the only British finalist at the 2000 Leeds International Piano Competition, and Viv McLean, who had also a clutch of important awards to his credit.

Lighter fare was provided by a return from The City Waites

and a words-and-music programme called *Rites of Passage* with oboist Jeremy Polmear, pianist Diana Ambache and the distinguished actress Janet Suzman, the latest in an impressive line-up of theatrical stars to grace the stage of the Library Theatre.

There had been concerns about falling numbers of supporters, but in the end the subscribers totalled 169, a reduction of only three, while attendances averaged 144, a fall of eight on the



Janet Suzman

previous season. Nonetheless, the Club needed to review and refresh its marketing strategy in order to find a new public. Trials were made with Classic FM, BBC Music Magazine, the Theatre brochure and so on. And in 2001 it established a website for the first time. To date it has not been especially successful and needs a radical overhaul to make it more appealing and helpful.

External financial help was also becoming increasingly difficult with funding sources having increasing demands on their resources, with a number of these reverting to guarantees against loss rather than direct grants or supporting only 'projects' rather than core costs. The Club had used many sources over the years and had to continue to look for new opportunities. It had become a major and time-consuming task for the

committee's funding officer, but an absolutely vital one. Even the Borough Council was not to be taken for granted, but an appeal to Hazel Simmons, Leader of the Council, resulted in the Club being awarded a three-year Service Level Agreement which guaranteed a minimum level of support for that period. This was a very welcome gesture on the Council's part and underlined the high regard in which its officers held the Club and its contribution to Luton's cultural life.

THE 2002/03 SEASON

The William Walton centenary series continued with a further three concerts, starting with the prestigious appearance of Susana Walton herself who, with Richard Baker, recited *Façade*. The instrumental ensemble was provided by The Purcell School, which also brought two speakers, Miranda Francis and Quentin Poole, to recite Adam Gorb's *Hymns Uproarious* and Kenneth Roberts' *Writers Vamp*. Lady Walton had stayed the night before the concert at Flitwick Manor, where Chris Thomas collected her and took her home to lunch with him and his wife before taking her into Luton for the rehearsal. The second Walton concert featured his second string quartet, played by the Bridge Quartet, while the celebratory series ended with a return visit from soprano Donna Bateman with pianist Christopher Glynn who tackled Walton's *A Song for the Lord Mayor's Table* and a couple of Sitwell settings.



Susana Walton



Richard Baker

Always on the lookout for new funding opportunities, the Club developed a Composer in the Community project featuring Richard Sisson, which was financially supported by a £5000 Awards for All lottery grant. The project involved four concerts showing Richard as composer, educator and, in *Kit and the Widow*, cabaret artist. The latter, with Kit Hesketh-Harvey and guest artist the



Kit and the Widow



Colin Currie

soprano Melanie Marshall, was wonderfully entertaining and very popular with the public, drawing in 230 people. Even more punters came to hear the percussionist Colin Currie, with Harriet Longman on musical saw and Caroline Dowdle on piano, aided by six Luton

music students on found percussion, playing Sisson's *The Song of the Carpenter*, specially commissioned by Harriet Longman. Amusingly, the hire of the saw was funded by a £150 donation from Gibbs and Dandy, the hardware merchants. The other two events in the project took the form of school workshops at Stopsley High School.

Following the collaboration with Symphonia Academica in the Finzi Festival, the Club offered the orchestra an engagement which was to become a regular fixture in future seasons. The costs were shared with the University of Luton (later Bedfordshire) where the orchestra had a residency. However the Music Club dates were to be more or less the only Luton engagements for the band. The Symphonia, most of whose players came from the BBC Concert Orchestra, generally fielded around 14 musicians, invariably conducted by David Beaman and led by Peter Bussereau. Programmes were devised jointly by the orchestra and the Club. Personnel from the University, usually including the Vice-Chancellor, attended the concerts regularly. For their inaugural concert in March 2003, the Symphonia offered an all-Russian programme with music by Borodin, Arensky, Shostakovich and Tchaikovsky.



Symphonia Academica

A novelty programme was John Lenehan's *Sounds for Silents* which presented several silent films with live piano music some of which was composed by Luton music students in an educational project led by John at Putteridge High School and funded by the *tuned in* scheme set up by Making Music (as the National Federation of Music Societies had become).

The Club continued to present the latest prizewinners from various competitions, a sure way of engaging some highly impressive talent. Among this season's crop were the Italian pianist Davide Francescetti, who took second prize at the 2000 Leeds International Piano Competition, the Russian violinist Natalia Lomeiko, winner of the 2000 Paganini Competition, and the oboist Owen Dennis, a winner of the 2000 Making Music Award for Young Concert Artists.



Competition successes in 2000: Davide Francescetti, Natalia Lomeiko & Owen Dennis

As usual the line-up of chamber ensembles was impressive with the Martinů (with pianist Christopher Langdown), Dante and Bochmann string quartets, and the Eimer and Gould piano trios. And violinist Anthony Marwood brought an intriguing Mozart programme which he and friends had played at the Wigmore Hall, beginning with a Duo and then adding one string at a time – a string trio, a string quartet, and – at the Wigmore at least – a string quintet. The Club decided to forgo the quintet as the concert would have gone on too long.

As mentioned a few pages back, the Finzi Festival led to the formation of the Luton Classical Music Network. Its aims were to build and share audiences and to develop co-operation between the various classical music groups in Luton, including the Borough Council and the Luton Music Service. The first meeting of the group was held in March 2003. The Music Club was always the prime driving force in the group as few initiatives came from any of the other participants. The Borough Council produced a brochure listing all such events for two seasons but eventually the enterprise died away through lack of will. No-one seemed to regret it!



The Gould Trio: Ben Frith, Lucy Gould & Alice Neary

Very gratifyingly, membership increased by 10 to 184; the average attendance was 157.

THE 2003/04 SEASON

As mentioned on the previous page, the Luton Classical Music Network produced a composite brochure for all classical music events in the town. This had been generally successful although there were production problems that had resulted in it appearing late which was especially irksome for the Music Club which began its season earlier than other organisations. However it did save the Club a lot of money, although some thought that the Club's identity had been forfeited to some extent. Another Network initiative was using one artist in a kind of residency: the American



Daniel Smith

bassoonist Daniel Smith was selected and worked with the Luton Symphony Orchestra and Symphonia Academica as well as giving a recital for the Club. Unfortunately he was, despite his considerable reputation, disappointing to all promoters involved, the feeling being that he was past his best. The Network organisations had also initially agreed to try and participate in the nationally planned *Year of Czech Music*, but in the event only the Music Club mounted suitable events with a recital by violinist Jana Novákova, the Škampa String Quartet, the Chamber of London Piano Quartet, and the Solaris String Quartet with baritone Stephen Wells. These last presented a tribute to Czech composers of the Terezin concentration camp persecution in the Second World War. The programme included words by three such composers Gideon Klein, Victor Ullman and Hans Krása as well as a more contemporary piece, *Terezin Ghetto Requiem* by Sylvie Bodorova. Music by Smetana and Josef Suk completed this moving concert.



Škampa Quartet

Jana Novákova was also one of the four performers in a *Stars of the Future* series, designed to showcase some



Jana Novákova

brilliant talent that promised exciting and illustrious careers. The other three were the cellist Richard Jenkinson who brought pianist Benjamin Frith back to the Club as his duo partner, pianist David Quigley, a winner of the latest Making Music Award for Young Concert Artists, and Chiao-Ying Chang, a prizewinner at the 2003 Leeds International Piano Competition. Wonderful as these players were – and no doubt still are - it has to be admitted that their careers have not be quite so glittering as the Club marketing might have suggested!



Guy Johnston



Magnus Johnston



Tom Poster

Equally young and impressive were the brothers Guy and Magnus Johnston, cello and violin, with Tom Poster at the piano. The Johnstons hailed from Harpenden, and brought a welcome local following as did the Wood sisters in a return visit a few weeks later.

The Symphonia Academica's second concert for the Club featured the premiere of a new Violin Concerto by Richard Sisson – including typically Sissonian unconventional parts for obligato harp and percussion. The concerto was played by the Symphonia's leader Peter Bussereau. This



Apollo Saxophone Quartet

concert proved enormously popular drawing an audience of 191, the same as *The Burning Bush*, playing music from the Jewish tradition. The latter was one of four programmes aimed at developing new audiences. This initiative had a mixed response with two of the shows – the Apollo Saxophone Quartet and Red Hot and Blue in classic songs from the shows drawing quite small audiences, while a wonderful new group called ZUM brought in a large crowd with its *Gypsy Tango Inferno* entertainment. The project was the subject of an application for lottery funding to Arts Council England East (as Eastern Arts had now become). The application, which was to cover three seasons, failed, ostensibly because the ACEE was unhappy with the financial viability of the project, but the Club rather thought that there were other (undeclared) reasons, which soured the relations between ACEE and the Club.



Zum: Gypsy Tango Inferno

The Club also took part in an initiative of Making Music Eastern Region called *Breakout!* aimed at encouraging the promotion of contemporary music. (The Club had little option but to take part since Chris Thomas was at the time Chairman of the Eastern Region Committee!). The concert in question was given by Chroma, a young ensemble of mixed wind and strings and the programme included the first performance of Gabriel Jackson's *In the Mendips*, new pieces by Bryn Harrison and Alastair Stout alongside repertory works by Mozart, Weber, Bax and Ravel.



Fujita Piano Trio



Gabriel Jackson

Among the visitors from abroad was the magical Fujita Piano Trio, three Japanese sisters who entranced everyone with their stage presence and amazed all by playing everything from memory, an almost unheard of accomplishment in chamber music. More remarkable playing came from the Russian Rachmaninov String Quartet who stayed the night with Chris and Liz Thomas but had to leave very early next morning to catch their flight back to Moscow. They got up late and rushed round so much that one player left her violin behind in the hall, but Chris managed to stop them driving off without it – it was only a Stradivarius.

The average attendance was a very disappointing 139, a fall of 11%. Membership fell even more dramatically from 184 to 155, a drop of almost 16%. This marked the start of a slow decline in public support for the Club's activities – and the start of many headaches!

THE 2004/05 SEASON

Once again the Borough Council produced a combined brochure of classical music events under the direction of the Luton Classical Music Network. However, production was so long delayed that it was useless for the Club's pre-season mailings. Fortunately the Club had produced a shortform leaflet for distribution at other summer concerts and was able to use this for mailshots. It looked increasingly likely that the Club would have to revert to producing its own brochure, which they did two seasons later, when the Network folded. But the Club wanted to commission a new design style for all its printed material and started a project with Barnfield College graphic arts students. This led to a more uniform style for brochures, programme covers and posters. There was no cost to the Club for this project.

The international *Year of Czech Music* continued into the autumn of 2004 and the Club mounted four concerts as its second contribution. Leading the celebration was the enormously prestigious Janáček Quartet, but there were contributions from the Greek pianist George-Emmanuel Lazaridis, from the Symphonia Academica, and from saxophonist Sarah Field with Simon Lepper at the piano.



George-Emmanuel Lazaridis



Simon Lepper and Sarah Field



Alan Rawsthorne

The other theme was a series of concerts to mark the centenary of the birth of composer Alan Rawsthorne. This was devised for the calendar year 2005 with three concerts in January and February and a further three the following autumn. The three concerts this season included the Flemish Rubio Quartet playing Haydn and Schubert and, with John McCabe at the piano, Rawsthorne's Piano Quintet and a new piece by McCabe himself, *The Woman by the Sea*. The Plane-Dukes-Rahman Trio returned to play Rawsthorne's Viola Sonata and music by Mozart, Schumann, John Woolrich and Jean Françaix. And the Eimer Piano Trio also made a return visit to play Rawsthorne's Piano Trio, with music by Haydn, Schubert and Dvořák. The short series was supported by the Rawsthorne Trust.

Following on from the 'new audiences' initiative the previous season, four further concerts of a lighter nature were planned. There were excellent audiences for the Stan Tracey Jazz Trio (189) and, extraordinarily, the euphonium player David Childs, a Making Music Young Artist, with Harvey Davies at the piano (187), but a return visit by the male vocal quartet Cantabile and the folk group the New Scorpion Band were less successful.



Stan Tracey



David Childs

The season had been introduced by the President, Antony Hopkins, in a very well attended talk and concert called *A Celebration of Mozart*, which culminated in a remarkable performance by Luton music students of the *Serenade for 13 wind instruments K361*, a very difficult work to bring off satisfactorily. It was a tribute to the tutors and to Luton Music Service who got such an undertaking together and so well. The audience of almost 200, with plenty of family and friends of the young players, was enthralled. However, such a high number of people was certainly untypical as the average attendance was 133 and the membership had shown a dramatic fall of 17 to 139. This was a

major concern to the Club which once again sought all manner of ideas to boost numbers, including a Sampler pack of four tickets to encourage newcomers to dip a toe in the musical water, and offers to special interest groups. The Club had come to realise that, for different financial and domestic reasons, many people were being selective in what they came to hear and chose not to commit themselves too far ahead. The kind of loyalty which the Club had been used to since the beginning was slowly diminishing and would probably vanish almost completely before long.

Attendances varied inexplicably sometimes. We have seen how a euphonium player could draw



James Oxley



Libor Nováček

187 but just as mysterious was why a *SongBook for Luton*, devised by Richard Sisson and consisting wholly of modern British art songs (admittedly featuring Catherine Bott, Roderick Williams, James Oxley and the like) could pull in more people than the wonderful Henschel String Quartet from Germany or high-calibre piano recitals of standard repertoire by the young Czech Libor Nováček and the Welsh wizard Llŷr Williams. Piano recitals, it seems, were no longer the sure-fire hit that they were once held to be.



Llŷr Williams

A major surprise was an invitation to Chris Thomas to a reception at Buckingham Palace on 1 March given by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh to celebrate British Music. Chris discovered that the invitation came at the instigation of Robin Osterley, Chief Executive of Making Music who had been asked by the Palace to submit a few names to represent the voluntary music sector. There were only about seven people in this group including Making Music officials, and so it was a mark of the esteem in which Chris and Luton Music Club was held that he should have been singled out for such an honour. There were 500 people at the reception drawn from all parts of the music industry, from major

performers in the classical and pop world to music broadcasters, educationalists, publishers, promoters and so on. It was a very informal occasion, the Queen circulating with a glass of wine in her hand and talking to as many of her guests as she could, including the Making Music party. It was a truly memorable occasion.



THE DIAMOND JUBILEE SEASON 2005/06

The Club's 60th anniversary was celebrated with a special gala concert in March 2006 given by the Symphonia Academica, led as usual by Peter Bussereau and conducted by David Beaman. The concert was calculated to be its 1800th programme. It was introduced by the Club President Antony Hopkins, and the soloists included the Luton-born soprano Christine Bunning, the local piano-duet team Jennifer Micallef and Glen Inanga, BBC Radio 3 presenter Petroc Trelawny who recited verses to Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals*, and Richard Sisson. Christine Bunning sang some delicious cabaret songs by Poulenc and Satie, as well some Beethoven settings of British folksongs. Also in the programme was another chance to hear *The Luton Variations* for piano duet



Peter Bussereau



Lindsay Kemp, Roger Wright and Michael Berkeley

by five composers with associations with the Club and a new piece by Richard Sisson, *Embryons désechées*. Among the many guests were the Mayor of Luton, Roger Wright, Controller of BBC Radio 3, musical critic and Radio 3 presenter Lindsay Kemp, and vice-presidents Monica McCabe and Michael Berkeley with his wife Deborah.

As another way of marking the Diamond Jubilee the Club

devised a short series of four concerts to also celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Mozart. The project involved the commissioning of pieces from four different composers to be inspired in some way by Mozart. The new works were to be programmed with relevant works by Mozart during the calendar year 2006. The selected composers were to be Kenneth Hesketh, Richard Sisson, Adam Gorb and Sally Beamish. Nicknamed Project Amadeus, these concerts were submitted to Arts Council England East for a major grant of over £20,000. Unfortunately this was unsuccessful and the project was all but abandoned. However two concerts were salvaged: the ensemble Chamber Domaine in March 2006, playing Mozart's great Divertimento for string trio, and the Zephyr Ensemble of London playing the Quintet for piano and wind. For this concert the Club did manage to commission a piece from Adam Gorb, for the same instrumentation. Entitled *A Better Place*, it was funded by the RVW Trust and the Worshipful Company of Musicians. Because of the unsatisfactory nature of its dealings with ACEE over this and a previous project, the Club decided not to risk further stress by any more applications for funding from that quarter.

In the event the Mozart tribute was expanded by inviting others to take part in a series, including return visits by the St Petersburg and Sacconi string quartets and an ensemble from the Purcell School in January and February 2006, and Guy and Magnus Johnston's Aronowitz Ensemble the following autumn. The Russian quartet was one of a whole army of artists from abroad including Austria (the Vienna Mozart Trio again), Belgium, the Czech Republic (the Wihan Quartet), France, China, Poland, Sri Lanka, Sweden and Turkey. The Chinese visitor was a Menuhin School star



International visitors to Luton: Wu Qian, Håkon Vramsmo & Ronald van Spaendonck

pianist-in-the-making from Shanghai, Wu Qian who dazzled the audience with her playing and compelling stage presence. Equally charismatic was the Swedish baritone Håkon Vramsmo who treated the Club to a rare performance here of Schumann's song cycle *Dichterliebe*, along with songs by Richard Strauss, Sibelius, Britten and Hugo Alfvén. A

third stunning European was the Belgian superstar clarinettist Ronald Van Spaendonck, a former BBC New Generation Artist, and by this time in worldwide demand.

But exceptional young native talent was not neglected either: audiences were treated to exciting performances from pianist Sam Haywood, the 'cheeky but enchanting' percussion team O Duo, Owen Gunnell and Oliver Cox, who had been recent winners of the Making Music Award for Young



Brilliant young British talent: Sam Haywood, Tom Carroll with Liŷr Williams & O Duo

Concert Artists, and cellist Thomas Carroll with pianist Liŷr Williams returning to accompany him. Tom came from the select Young Concert Artists Trust stable, which again the Club used at least once every season.

The Rawsthorne centenary tribute continued with performances of five more of his works. Robert Plane's ensemble Mobius played the Clarinet Quartet, Krysia Osostowicz and Simon Crawford-Phillips performed the Violin Sonata, with Simon also playing the Four Bagatelles for piano solo, and finally the renowned Endymion Ensemble gave the Sonatina for flute, cello and piano and the Cello Sonata. These concerts were supported by The Rawsthorne Trust.

There had been concerns about the condition of the piano in the recent seasons and consequently in the summer of 2005 the Theatre commissioned a survey of the instrument from Richard Reason Pianos of Hitchin. Their report identified a number of deficiencies, notably the worn hammers of the action. Work to rectify the problems was undertaken in the early autumn of 2005 and the costs shared between the Theatre and the Club. From then on a comment book was introduced in which pianists' opinions of the instrument could be recorded. Views varied considerably but in general it was felt that the piano was simply showing its age, although as one pianist said 'it performs well for an old lady'. In fact in the rest of the 2005/06 season there were only two adverse comments. The Club's pianists were of sufficient calibre to get the best of the instrument but it was sometimes hard work. As Simon Lepper said the following season 'everybody will soldier on'. Much as the Club would have liked a replacement piano, the cost and the infrequency of use (it was by this time barely used at all by other hirers of the theatre) precluded any change.

Membership and attendances continued their depressing downward trend, despite various attempts to boost interest among an increasingly uninterested public. The number of subscribers fell to 109, while the average attendance was 122, which was somewhat distorted by the almost full house for the Diamond Jubilee Gala. Efforts to attract a younger audience through educational workshops and similar school events met with little success despite the best efforts of the Club and the Luton Music Service. Among these events was a composition project led by Richard Sisson, the results of which were featured in the concert by the Purcell School ensemble.



This was the last season in which the Luton Classical Music Network produced its brochure. Thereafter the Club reverted to producing its own brochure, a move which was welcomed by all.

A major surprise came in the New Year when Chris Thomas was one of the winners of the Mayor's Award for Citizenship, awarded annually by Luton Borough Council to individuals who have given outstanding service to the community. The award was presented at a ceremony and reception at the Town Hall on 26 January 2006.

THE 2006/07 SEASON

By this time the number of concerts had been reduced to 21 and was to remain at that level (or 20 sometimes) for some years. Subscription rates had to be increased annually particularly since the price per concert was ridiculously low given the high quality of musicians. This season, for instance, the subscription worked out at £6.14 a concert. The Club decided to increase the subscription gradually so that it became more realistic: by 2013/14 it had moved up to £8.75 a concert, which the Club felt was about right. This was also the last season in which the Club offered a concessionary rate to senior citizens. It seemed somewhat anomalous to continue this practice since most of the subscribers were eligible for the lower rate. It had also been noted that many other music clubs in the area had dispensed with senior citizen concessions, no doubt for much the same reason.

The season included an impressive array of fine solo pianists including the Malaysian Bobby Chen, Warren Mailley-Smith and Danny Driver, who included a new piece by Richard Sisson called *Crowd* in his programme.



Notable young keyboard masters: Bobby Chen, Warren Mailley-Smith & Danny Driver

Richard Sisson also produced a piece called *Monkey Dances* for the annual concert by Symphonia Academica, with which Richard was by this time composer-in-association. The central work of the concert was Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale*, complete with narration, which was handled with his usual suave aplomb by BBC Radio 3's Petroc Trelawny, fast becoming quite a regular visitor to the Club. This was the first time that Stravinsky's dramatic piece had been heard at the Club in its entirety.



Petroc Trelawny



The Bridge Duo

The main thread of the programming was a series of concerts featuring the music of Sir Arthur Bliss, which had not often been heard at the Club. The concerts were all in the calendar year 2007, and so spread over two seasons. The 2006/07 concerts featured a return visit from the Frith Piano Quartet, who played Bliss's 1915 Quartet, violist Matthew Jones and pianist Michael Hampton, performing as The Bridge Duo, who gave the 1933 Viola Sonata, and return visits from the Sacconi Quartet and clarinettist David Campbell, who presented the 1931 Clarinet Quintet. The series was supported by The Bliss Trust.

There were further return visits from the Allegri and Henschel string quartets, the Palladian Ensemble, the percussion group Classic Rhythm, Guy and Magnus Johnston's Arnowitz Ensemble, violinist Madeleine Mitchell, guitarist Craig Ogden, Thomas Carroll with his piano trio Dimension, winner of the prestigious Parkhouse Award, and several more. Audiences much enjoyed seeing artists again and again, and indeed the musicians themselves invariably loved coming to what they always said was such a warm and hospitable atmosphere with an excellent audience which listens so intently.

As the trumpeter Crispian Steele-Perkins was to write in October 2007: “[Luton is] as ever, one of the best organised and most hospitable clubs in the country.”



Madeleine Mitchell



Dimension

As mentioned a couple of pages back the Club now produced its own brochure again, following the cost-cutting of the Luton Classical Music Network. This was designed by the Secretary, Terry Lockyer, who became responsible for the brochure design and production in the following seasons. The concerts continued to be

marketed as ‘Music on Mondays’. Space was found for photographs of all artists leaving little room for the textual description of each concert, which developed into an art form all of its own. The following season the cover image was changed to a string quartet and then in 2008/09 Terry Lockyer introduced a striking new design featuring a female violinist, inspired by Toulouse Lautrec. This design was to be continued with slight modifications for several seasons.



Subscriber numbers rose slightly from 126 to 134, and average attendance went up by 8 to 130, reversing a four-year trend of falling numbers. It wasn't to last.

THE 2007/08 SEASON

The Bliss series continued with three more concerts, all supported once again by The Bliss Trust. The young Guillami Quartet played Bliss's first string quartet, followed by George Caird and friends playing the Oboe Quintet. This concert was fixed up over a drink at Buckingham Palace when Chris Thomas bumped into George, an old friend, then principal of the Birmingham Conservatoire,



George Caird



Ashley Wass

at the reception to celebrate British music described a few pages back. The final concert was given by students from the Purcell School and included Bliss's *Pastoral* for clarinet and piano and *Two Interludes* for solo piano. One of Bliss's contemporaries, Frank Bridge, was also featured in a short series also spread over two seasons. In the first of three programmes in winter 2008, cellist Thomas Carroll returned with pianist Llŷr Williams to play Bridge's Cello Sonata and four shorter pieces, while a month later the young star pianist Ashley Wass tackled the Piano Sonata. Lastly violinist Susanne Stanzeleit and pianist Julian Jacobson gave the Violin Sonata. The performances were supported by the Frank Bridge Bequest.

As already noted the increase in attendances did not last and fell this season to 123 (from 130). Membership also fell slightly to 130. The highest attendance was a return visit from Lucie Skeaping's Jewish music group The Burning Bush which drew 174 because it had been given a good deal of publicity among the Jewish community in Luton. The next largest house was 157 for



Blowing well: young Sarah Williamson and veteran Crispian Steele-Perkins



Adam Summerhayes

Symphonia Academica but, as always, the numbers for the orchestra's concerts were inflated by a good number of guests from the University of Bedfordshire which supported the concerts financially. Not surprisingly the Doric Quartet with glamorous young clarinettist Sarah Williamson drew a good house (143) with a popular programme of Mozart, Haydn and Weber. But the big surprise was trumpeter Crispian Steele-Perkins who, with pianist Leslie Pearson, drew no less than 149 people with his very entertaining mix of music, anecdotes, demonstrations and humour. It was salutary to be reminded how his name still registered with many people, not least with brass players in the area.

The Theatre's pantomime season seemed to start earlier and earlier and it was becoming awkward to fit in a concert in early December. Scenery was often already in place and backstage was full of costumes and props. This season the Club presented its pre-Christmas concert in the lending area of the Library instead of the theatre. This proved quite popular and the bright acoustic improved the sound for the world of Zum3, Adam Summerhayes' trio of violin, cello and accordion, in a rousing fusion of European Gypsy music and Argentinean tango.



Gitarissima

Another lighter show was *Gitarissima*, five young female guitarists from Austria, Hungary and Germany playing arrangements of popular classics.

The Club continued to patronise the London International String Quartet Competition and welcomed the 2003 winners, the Russian Atrium Quartet. And for the last time it supported the Leeds International Piano Competition by engaging the runner-up in the 2006 event, the American Andrew Brownell. The Club remained loyal too to the Making Music Award for Young

Concert Artists and engaged a brilliant violinist Thomas Gould with his equally impressive pianist John Reid. Competitions such as these remained a sure way of selecting some of the finest musical talent on the scene.



Andrew Brownell



Thomas Gould

There were major developments in the way Luton Borough Council ran cultural activities in the town. Due to financial constraints all round responsibility for libraries, museums and the arts was transferred from the Council to a new charitable organisation, Luton Cultural Services Trust. The change was made on 1 March 2008. The change was to have major implications for the level of support which the Club was used to receiving from the local authority. The Library Theatre's overall programme of events was drastically curtailed with professional input being all but abandoned, reduced showings of films and the withdrawal of most amateur theatre groups. The Music Club was becoming the main hiring organisation, without which the Theatre's future would be very questionable indeed.

THE 2008/09 SEASON

Major refurbishment to the Library Theatre meant that the Club had to move to the Hat Factory Arts Centre in Bute Street for the whole of the second half of the season. The Borough Council paid for all extra expenses including that of moving the Blüthner grand piano. The concerts were held in the ground floor Gallery, the largest performing space in the building. A platform had to be made up strong enough to hold the piano. Seats had to be put out each week by the staff but the space could only take a maximum of 120 chairs, which was enough for the Club at the prevailing rates of attendance. The acoustic was a bright contrast to the dry sound at the Library Theatre. Audiences relished the refreshments in the front café but were less happy with the other facilities. But the Club was lucky to have somewhere else to hold its concerts and to have most of it all arranged. The move made most people appreciate the comfort and atmosphere of the Theatre all the more.

The Frank Bridge feature, again funded by the Frank Bridge Bequest, concluded with two more concerts. In October the enterprising pianist Mark Bebbington, played Bridge's *The Hour Glass* along with Howard Ferguson's rarely heard piano sonata and other byways of keyboard music. Two weeks later the aptly-named London Bridge Ensemble treated audiences to Bridge's *Phantasy* Piano Quartet with Vaughan Williams' Piano Quintet and Schubert's perennial favourite, the *Trout* Quintet. Mark Bebbington was one of three enormously impressive pianists who thrilled audiences: the young Russian virtuoso Alexander Karpeyev kicked off the Club's short sojourn at The Hat Factory while towards the end of that evacuation, one of the finest British pianists, Angela Brownridge, was welcomed to the Club.



Brilliant masters of the keyboard: Mark Bebbington, Angela Brownridge & Alexander Karpeyev

There was a good deal more British music in the programmes than Bridge, Howard Ferguson and Vaughan Williams. For a start all four of the Club's composer vice-presidents were represented, three of them – Michael Berkeley, Stephen Dodgson and John McCabe – in a single concert by the



Fine Arts Brass



Tamsin Waley-Cohen

Fine Arts Brass. Michael was also featured in the recital by the charismatic young violinist Tamsin Waley-Cohen with pianist Gary Matthewman who played his piece *Persistent Memory*. Stephen Dodgson's sixth string quartet was heard in a concert by the Tippett Quartet on their first visit to Luton. And John McCabe's *Postcards* had been programmed in a concert by

the wind-and-piano ensemble Zephyr but this had to be cancelled due to snow, although the group, which came from North Wales, had managed to reach Luton in the morning to give a school concert.

Two pieces by Richard Sisson were heard – the third performance at the Club of his trio for flute, cello and piano *Amo, amas, amat*, played this time by the Abruzzi Trio, and a single song in an enterprising programme of Finzi, Ireland, Vaughan Williams and Duparc by the baritone Roderick Williams, in a welcome return visit. Audiences also heard Britten's third string quartet in a stunning concert by the new Elias Quartet.

The lighter aspects of music were not forgotten, however, as the Fine Arts Brass concert showed. The dazzling saxophonist Sarah Field returned this time with Mike Hamnett on marimba and vibraphone in a truly offbeat kaleidoscope of delightful musical discoveries.



Sarah Field & Mike Hamnett



Hatstand Opera

Kit and the Widow returned to bring the largest house of the season by far, but most hilarious of all was the irrepressible Hatstand Opera in a thoroughly entertaining selection of operatic arias, duets and ensembles, all in appropriate costume and performed with enormous panache.

Local authority funding was still forthcoming via the Luton Cultural Services Trust which provided the Club with an indirect subsidy of £3080, which paid for the larger part of the theatre hire costs. Membership remained steady at 132 but the average audience numbers fell to 114, although this was considerably distorted by the very large audience for Kit and the Widow (204). As already noted, audience numbers at the Hat Factory were constrained by the size of the auditorium but even so the demand for seats there never exceeded availability. Of course, the house there always looked gratifyingly packed compared with the discouraging array of empty seats the Library Theatre regularly showed for similar sized audiences.



The Hat Factory Arts Centre, Luton

THE 2009/10 SEASON

As frequently happened in the life of the Club, there was much head scratching as to whether changes should be made as to how the organisation was run. This self-questioning was very comprehensive and related to every aspect of its operation from the number and frequency of concerts, the time of the year and week and day they should be presented, the amount spent on artists, the admission prices, and so on. From time to time the audience was consulted too, by means of questionnaires, as in this season. Invariably the responses, both by the committee and the public, were varied, leading to some minor tweaking of certain aspects but no major changes. It was also accepted that there were some things the Club could do nothing about, such as domestic issues which prevented people getting out to concerts easily, old age and infirmity, and indeed lack of interest in classical music among a large proportion of the population of Luton. And so the concert seasons continued much as in the past.

One major problem which did not help matters was the closure of the multi-storey Library car park which must have had some effect on attendances. This was caused by the identification of major structural defects which made the building unsafe. The car park remained closed for some years while its owners, the Arndale Centre, worked out a solution. In the end the building was demolished and a smaller open-air car park opened on the site in 2013. Meanwhile audiences were forced to park elsewhere, mostly in the Arndale car park, which involved a longer walk to the Theatre.

The closure of the Library Park may well have contributed to a fall of 9.4% in the average audience numbers to 103. The subscriber numbers also fell from 132 to 124. But audiences remained enthusiastic about what they heard and saw on stage, which included some very entertaining programmes. Among these was a words-and-music celebration of the life and loves of Franz Liszt, with actors Rosalind Ayres and Martin Jarvis and pianist Lucy Parham, a vibrant early music show from Joglaresa called *Four Thousand Winters*, with medieval and traditional seasonal music and stories, and the enormously successful duo Chris Cranham and Stewart Death, known as *Travelling by Tuba*.



Lighter entertainment at the Club: Martin Jarvis, Joglaresa & Travelling by Tuba

In enticing new audiences, it was certainly important for the Club to present a number of concerts as 'entertainments' rather than 'serious' recitals. These involved plenty of informative and humorous chat linking the musical items, which added to the audience appeal. And so for example, in addition to the three programmes just mentioned, the woodwind trio Canteloube presented a divertissement of 'easy-on-the-ear' pieces by the likes of Mozart, Gordon Jacob, Milhaud, Pierné and others, and the early music duo Laura Cannell and Adrian Lever, playing under the intriguing name Horses Brawl, offered an engaging and highly theatrical fusion of folk, medieval and baroque sounds. Later on, the Making Music Young Artist and highly personable saxophonist Hannah Marcinowicz delighted the audience with an eclectic mixture of classical and popular music, while on St David's Day the vivacious young harp-and-cello duo of Eleanor Turner and Rowena Calvert presented a sequence of delightful pieces including some Welsh numbers.



Entertainers all: Hannah Marcinowicz, Horses Brawl & Eleanor Turner

The Club welcomed three superb young string quartets which coincidentally happened to be the top three prizewinners in the Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition in 2007. They were the two British ensembles, the Badke and Navarra quartets, and the French Ardeo Quartet who were joined by the young Russian virtuoso Alexander Karpeyev who had thrilled the Club audience the previous season. Among other artists returning were pianist Danny Driver, the viola player Matthew Jones and pianist Michael Hampton in a programme which included the Viola Sonata by Club President Antony Hopkins, the remarkable Fujita Piano Trio, clarinettist Angus Meryon with his pianist Richard Saxel but this time with cellist Jitka Vlasankova, and of course the regular visitors, Symphonia Academica which gave the first performance of Richard Sisson's Concerto for oboe and violin.

The Club's policy already mentioned of starting and ending the season with really popular



Daniel de Borah



Trio Con Brio Copenhagen

programmes brought the Primrose Piano Quartet, led by violinist Susanne Stanzeleit in a happy return, in a mix of Fauré, Brahms and William Hurlstone, while the season ended with a fine piano recital by the Australian Daniel de Borah, preceded on the night the Club began selling

subscriptions for the following season by the stunning Trio Con Brio from Copenhagen, a concert winning enough for audiences to get out their cheque books immediately!

Funding was helped by a three-year bequest from a member of Luton North Rotary Club and by a new source of community funding, the Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation's London-Luton Airport Community Fund, which donated a generous £1000. These were in addition to the 'usual' financial support from the Steel Charitable Trust. The Club had come to depend strongly on this source of support although it was careful never to take any source of help for granted, no matter how regular it appeared to be.

THE 2010/11 SEASON

The music of John Ireland was featured in six concerts generously supported by the John Ireland Trust. Pianist Mark Bebbington, a champion of the composer's music, returned to launch the series playing the *London Pieces*, followed by the Holywell Ensemble which offered the Sextet for clarinet, horn and string quartet. The Cello Sonata was played by Victoria Simonsen and Marisa Gupta, while the Fantasy Trio was given by the highly impressive Aquinas Piano Trio. A newly discovered trio for clarinet, cello and piano was a highlight of the concert by Sarah Williamson, Gemma Rosefield and Mark Bebbington, along with the *Fantasy Clarinet Sonata*, and the series concluded with the second violin sonata played by Siân Philipps and Per Rundberg. The latter was a special concert to mark the 90th birthday of Club President Antony Hopkins, who managed to attend despite his infirmities and to introduce three of his own pieces in his inimitable way.

International visitors included return visits from the Henschel Quartet and pianist Libor Nováček,



Alexandra Dariescu



Travis Finch



Alison Stephens

plus the Vogler String Quartet, recognised as one of the best in the world. The Club also welcomed the young Romanian pianist Alexandra Dariescu, and the American mandolin player Travis Finch who stepped in to replace Alison Stephens who sadly died of cervical

cancer in October 2010 at the age of 40. Mr Finch's concert with popular Australian guitarist Craig Ogden, was dedicated to Alison's memory.

The annual Symphonia Academica concert included a rare and intriguing performance of a chamber version of Mahler's Fourth Symphony, plus two works by the Symphonia's Composer-in-Association, Richard Sisson. The first was arrangements of a group of songs by Kurt Weill followed by a piece with African inspiration called *The Mukamba Tree*, which had a text narrated by Petroc Trelawny. *The Mukamba Tree* is based on the book of the same name by June Farquhar. The work was originally commissioned for the Bulawayo Festival in Zimbabwe, May 2010, and explores the culture of the N'debele people whilst also looking at environmental issues. Students from Luton Sixth Form College provided the vocals and added to the instrumentation. The work was later repeated in Lambeth by the South Bank Symphonia.



In the summer of 2010 the Theatre's Blüthner piano underwent a major overhaul, the cost of which, like the regular piano tunings, was shared between the Club and the Theatre.

The Club found yet another source of funding in the Major Simon Whitbread Charitable Trust, which was generous enough to offer £2500. The so-called Airport Fund was also helpful with a £1500 grant and the Steel Charitable Trust, loyal as ever, came up with £2500. Altogether the Club's external funding amounted to £9100. This was in addition to the considerable help afforded by the Luton Cultural Services Trust which paid the Theatre hire charges directly, under the terms of the Service Level Agreement. This support was worth around £3600.

A major development was the introduction of a Friends scheme which provided discounts on single tickets in return for a £10 joining fee. The scheme was aimed at people who wished to come to several concerts but did not want the commitment or the expense of a full subscription. The scheme was augmented by regular publicity via email about forthcoming concerts. Starting

tentatively with 21 Friends the scheme built up steadily to become a valuable tool in audience building, which at the same time encouraged a certain amount of loyalty to the Club. The subscriber membership fell to 113 while the average attendance was 102. The Friends scheme was to prove a salvation in maintaining audience levels.



Baroque Fusion

Spirits were raised all round when the colourful 'Baroque Fusion' ensemble presented their show Christmas Spice, a dazzling entertainment using dulcimers, recorders, viol, percussion and flamenco guitar in a sequence of music from the Hispanic tradition. Olé!

THE 2011/12 SEASON

Despite a whole range of favourite artists making welcome return visits, including the Gould Trio, Sam Haywood, the Primrose Piano Quartet, Eleanor Turner, Roderick Williams, Hannah Marcinowicz, Cantabile, the Sacconi Quartet, Craig Ogden and several more, membership fell dramatically from 97 to 83 and the average audience dropped from 102 to 91. The fall in membership was to some extent explained by members becoming Friends rather than taking out a full subscription, a trend which was entirely predictable, but the drop in audience numbers was worrying, especially given that there was no bad weather to affect attendance figures. The figures certainly validated the worth of the Friends scheme which now numbered 43 takers. It was decided to treat Friends as 'members' of the Club, with full voting rights at the Annual General Meetings.

Just as impressive as the favourites just mentioned were some extraordinary newcomers. The Piatti String Quartet were winners of the first St Martin's Chamber Music Competition, organised in association with Making Music. Their ravishing performances of Haydn, Beethoven and Smetana



Philip Higham



Mark Stone



Stephen Barlow

thrilled the audience. Making Music's own young artist competition was also represented by the cellist Philip Higham who, with his pianist Nicola Eimer, impressed all who heard him. And the baritone Mark Stone, a young man clearly going places, gave a memorable recital with pianist Stephen Barlow to mark Remembrance Day, including some Housman settings by Butterworth and C W Orr, Vaughan Williams' *Songs of Travel* and Quilter's song cycle *To Julia*.

Vice-President John McCabe had suggested that the Club might be interested in a performance of his new Clarinet Quintet, an offer which was readily accepted. The work was given by the Kreutzer Quartet, long absent from the Club's programmes, with clarinetist Linda Merrick. John McCabe and his wife Monica made the arduous journey from Kent to hear the Quintet and were welcomed warmly by the audience. Another Vice-President, Richard Sisson, had his Concerto for two violins and strings performed by the Symphonia Academica in their annual concert, along with Bach's own Double Concerto, Bach's cantata *Ich habe genug* and some arrangements of songs by Frank Bridge. The singer was popular baritone Roderick Williams.

Sources of funding were much as in the previous season but the total amount was considerably reduced, including a reduction of £1000 in the Luton Cultural Services Trust's Service Level Agreement. External funding was becoming increasingly difficult and support from Luton itself was diminishing fast due to the Borough Council's financial constraints. It was the start of some very hard times for the Club and the Committee was starting to ask itself radical questions about its future.

THE 2012/13 SEASON

This was to be the last season planned by Chris Thomas who had been responsible for programming for 41 years. That represented over 950 concerts, recitals and talks. The concert seasons had eventually come to be the only performances of professional classical music in Luton, apart from the occasional organ recital. At the Annual General Meeting in 2012, Richard Sisson was elected to take over the role and began planning for his first season in 2013/14. Chris Thomas remained as Chairman, a role which he had assumed for over 15 years, when he took over from John Thompson, himself a founder member of the Club and one of the Club's most tireless officials over 50 years. John had died in 2012 and the concert by the Schubert Ensemble in October that year was dedicated to his memory. A collection was made on behalf of Macmillan Nurses.

Richard Sisson had in fact taken over planning for the last concert of this season when he invited Roger Wright, Controller of BBC Radio 3 and Director of the Proms, to be interviewed by Petroc Trelawny, in a Face-to-Face chat, with music provided by the Berkeley Ensemble. British music was very much to the fore in their contribution, presaging the theme of Richard Sisson's first season's 'Celebrating British Composers'. He was also strongly represented in the annual concert by Symphonia Academica in which his arrangements of five well-known Chopin pieces were heard along with his *Ballad of Charlotte Dymond*. In this piece the orchestra was joined by Luton Youth Cantores, a highly impressive group of singers, under their musical director Kerry Watson and by Richard himself as narrator. The choir also sang *The Snow*, an early part-song by Elgar and Fauré's *Cantique de Jean Racine*, while the remainder of the programme offered music by Purcell, Handel, Debussy and Ravel.



William Mathias



Huw Watkins

British music had always been a key component of Chris Thomas' planning, too. Apart from its intrinsic musical worth and interest, it was often a source of helpful funding. This season saw the performance of works by William Mathias, Adam Gorb, Herbert Howells, Howard Ferguson and Huw Watkins, among others.

Once again the artist line-up was a mix of returning favourites and talented newcomers. Among the former were husband-and-wife piano duettists Anthony Goldstone and Caroline Clemmow, clarinettist Angus Meryon with pianist Richard Saxel, violinist Tamsin Waley-Cohen, pianists Danny Driver and Bobby Chen, the Navarra Quartet, the flamboyant baroque group Red Priest and the brass entertainment *Travelling by Tuba* in their sequel show.



Red Priest

The newcomers were the Heath String Quartet and the Rhodes Piano Trio, both from the stable of the Young

Concert Artists Trust, the Aquarelle Guitar Quartet, the Primavera Ensemble playing music for five and six strings by Richard Strauss, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, and the Czech pianist Ivana Gavrić, who had been dubbed 'Newcomer of the Year' by *BBC Music Magazine* in 2011 and 'One to Watch' by the *Gramophone Magazine*.



Aquarelle Guitar Quartet



Ivana Gavrić

Bad weather caused problems on two occasions: the *Travelling by Tuba* show had to be postponed from January and was reinstated at the end of the season, but the *Fibonacci Sequence*, directed by Kathron Sturrock, had to be cancelled completely due to snow. The artists had to be paid of course but the Club was able to reclaim from its insurance arrangements with Making Music.

The number of full subscribers was more or less steady and the average audience also remained unchanged. Encouragingly, the number of Friends increased slightly to 47, endorsing the wisdom of this initiative. The Club now felt that new full subscribers were likely to be fewer and fewer, and that the thrust of marketing should be on selling the Friends scheme, and on selling single tickets. The funding situation continued to be bleak: the Luton Cultural Services Trust informed the Club that, due to the massive cuts it was having to make through Government edict, support for its activities was to be curtailed and very soon stopped altogether. In the future the Club would have to find the funds to pay the going rate for Theatre and piano hire. It was fortunate that its reserves were healthy enough to fund shortfalls for a few seasons but thereafter more drastic solutions would have to be found.

POSTSCRIPT

This has been a remarkable story. Of all the 400 or so music clubs in this country, Luton has stood alone for many years, and for many reasons: the number of its programmes, the steadfast weekly loyalty of its members, the enterprise and variety of its concerts, the attentiveness of its audiences and the warmth of its hospitality. Its devotion to British music has been second to none as has its patronage of the best of young emerging talent of the highest order. It has attracted the continued admiration of performing musicians, composers, concert agents and managers, other music clubs and promoters, funding organisations and many others in the musical world. It has put the town of Luton on the cultural map in a way that has amazed many people outside the town who had a very poor impression of the town's cultural pretensions. Its reputation is supreme. Long may it remain so, for it would be a sad day if ever such an illustrious 'jewel in the crown' should cease to be.

Chris Thomas

December 2013

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