

ECMTA Notes

From the Chairman of the European Chamber Music Teachers' Association

First published in German in *Ensemble Magazin*, Vol 5, 2011

Innovation and curriculum: post-graduate programs at the Guildhall School in London

Two tendencies in post-graduate studies in music are particularly clear in recent years: the creation of post-graduate diplomas in chamber music which include career skills as a complement to artistic training, and the development of training programs which teach musicians to enrich and employ their music as a tool for much larger outreach activity. Although such programs are not often connected within a single school, these trends are actually related. It is true that both have been a part of training in many schools for some time now, but the evolution of the music marketplace and the music profession seem to reinforce these tendencies with ever growing urgency, and it appears that music conservatories increasingly recognize that these tools are indispensable not only for artistic growth, but for the survival of the musical arts as we know them.

Chamber music can be seen as an exceptional entrepreneurial activity, well-adapted to the mercurial changes affecting the music industry. More flexible than orchestras artistically, administratively, logistically, pedagogically and financially, compelling to contemporary audiences because of its collaborative aspect (as Daniel Koschitski put it quite simply, it is more like "a band"), its appeal to both musicians, audiences, and concert organizers and promoters is very clear. And the importance of outreach is now accepted across Europe, with more and more skilled mediators showing that it is not sufficient to simply play a concert in order to reach new audiences. Further, what is being learned in outreach activities is having a constructive impact on the traditional concert format (witness the success of the new Festival Musiq3 in Brussels or the innovative program formats of Spark – the Classical Band and the cellist Umberto Clerici described in the last issue). With its exceptional practical and artistic potential – mobility, diverse repertoire, intimacy, collaborative model – chamber music can be considered a instrument of choice for reaching out to new audiences,

The United Kingdom has long been at the vanguard of this movement, although not necessarily for positive reasons. Since at least the budget restrictions of the Thatcher years, cultural institutions have learned to adapt, find innovative ways to interact with audiences and, just as importantly, find innovative ways to finance their activities and justify them in competition with other cultural sectors. The London Symphony Orchestra has long developed programs to reach new audiences (the Cité de la musique in Paris chose to collaborate with them for this purpose), and the Royal College of Music has an entire institute devoted to instructing students in the art of outreach. As a visit last March to the Guildhall School confirmed, other schools in London have been equally engaged since the 80s in looking for ways to provide this kind of skill.

More recently, Alasdair Tait, former cellist of the Belcea Quartet and former member of the founding board of the ECMTA, joined the faculty of the Guildhall School as Head of Chamber Music just three years ago, after serving in the same role at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. He brings to the job special skills and understanding, not only thanks to his years in the quartet and his experience as a teacher, but because he also happens to be the Chief Executive of Young Concert Artists Trust, a national scheme to assist the most promising young UK artists in making the transition to fully professional activity. In this short time he has thus worked to structure the post-graduate chamber music program in order to balance pedagogical and professional concerns, most importantly by creating pre-formed ensemble fellowships and attracting high-profile quartets in residence as mentors (current ensembles are the Takács, Belcea, and Endellion Quartets!).

The postgraduate study program is organized now in several tiers:

- In general it is a two year program. the first year is open to all qualified instrumentalists, who may apply as individuals and then play in one or several groups depending on enrollment. In the second year, they are expected to be in a pre-formed group. Pre-formed ensembles may also apply, and they may benefit from fee scholarships. The ensembles have weekly lessons.
- At a higher level, advanced pre-formed trios and quartets (one each), may be selected for a fellowship, consisting of free tuition and a stipend of 6000 GBP (private donors scholarship). They benefit from weekly lessons, from privileged contact with the quartets in residence and the opportunity to do supervised coaching of undergraduate chamber ensembles. This last element brings depth to the entire program, since the fellowship ensembles become a bridge between the master teachers and the younger students, and thus acquire precious teaching skills.

Furthermore, most of the qualified ensembles take advantage of the masterclasses made available in part through an agreement with the London Symphony Orchestra, which facilitates the availability of the soloists programmed in their season on a regular basis. Other masterclasses include artists Daniel Philips, Gary Hoffman, Isabel Charisius, and Andras Keller.

Performance opportunities are of course indispensable, and they are provided by the LSO in a pre-concert format as a free offer to ticket holders for LSO concerts, and by partnerships with the Barbican theater and galleries. Other partnerships and projects are currently being explored as well. Tait intends to give the pedagogical side of the scheme even greater depth in the future by holding auditions for trio and quartet fellowships in alternate years so that it is possible for each fellowship ensemble to play a kind of mentoring role for the newer ensembles in the program.

The Dialogue project

Guildhall students have another tremendous advantage, because these programs take place in an environment already strongly oriented towards the encouragement of professional skills in outreach. Guildhall possesses a most unique postgraduate program, presently lead by Sigrun Griffiths and Nell Catchpole, which is part of the Guildhall/Barbican Creative Learning Division. The "Artist Programme in Leadership," which has been going on at Guildhall under various titles for 30 years, means basically teaching musicians how to complement their musical skills with other communication, pedagogical, cross-discipline, and group motivation techniques in order to lead cultural projects, whether it be with musically initiated publics or not. Of course, this program is not specifically directed to chamber musicians, but all of the processes introduced and employed would seem invaluable to every ensemble looking to create a residency or an outreach project. For this reason, participation in this training and its projects is open to students from other departments as an elective. Some of the processes needed to be a project leader include:

- composing
- arranging
- orchestrating
- being able to speak in a way that is accessible to all participants: principal trumpet of LSO to a 7 year old beginner
- keeping all participants working at their level with relevant challenges
- keeping all participants engaged

- actively soliciting and facilitating creative input from all participants
- structuring creative ideas in order to make sense in the overall project (knowing how to choose which elements to use)
- managing behavior

This might appear rather abstract, but I had the opportunity to observe one of these projects for a day in the company of Sigrun Griffiths, and what could be seen was anything but theoretical. For this annual project, started already in the 80s – and which Ms Griffiths has been overseeing along with her husband Paul for the past 11 years – Guildhall works in a partnership with the Barbican Centre, two primary schools (Scurr and Bangabandhu) and one secondary school (Morpeth) in the inner city neighborhood of London called Globetown. From the Barbican comes the poet Francesca Beard, and from Guildhall, in addition to Paul and Sigrun Griffiths, come both students of the Leadership training program and other postgraduate students who have chosen to do this project as an elective course (this year, a total of 11 students).

The idea is that the children should participate actively in the elaboration of an artistic event, to be presented in the Barbican Centre, and that through this activity they should acquire numerous benefits: confidence, creative stimulation, autonomy, discipline, and, eventually, greater understanding and appreciation of what artistic activity brings to life. Without exaggeration, it can also be said that they are learning the art of chamber music in its purest form: the art of listening to each other.

The project takes place every year in January/February, with about 200 children participating: two classes from each primary school, including children who play or do not play instruments, and the chorus and instrumental ensembles from the secondary school. This year integrated part of a Barbican project originally focusing on poetry: Francesca Beard thus participated in the workshops with the music students in order to guide creation of texts, which will be either juxtaposed or interspersed between musical numbers. One group of primary school students is specifically selected for writing – but in the course of the workshops all children are working on texts.

The theme for the 2011 project was “Lines,” and all ramifications of lines are explored: lines of text or music, lines as boundaries, lines of connection, lines used to trace a figure or lines holding up or tying in a structure. Some children are working on “last lines” and others on “first lines” (introductions, meetings, starting a conversation).

Sigrun and Paul Griffiths worked with the Leadership students in advance to establish processes and principles of interaction, and then accorded them the responsibility for running the workshops. On the day I observed, Jenny and Nicoletta, from the Leadership program, worked with Francesca Beard, Ashton worked together with the students from other departments. They in turn worked with two groups of children. After only one morning session and one afternoon session, through the working out of exercises and processes, the two groups came together and presented what were already several fascinating little pieces based on texts, rhythms, and songs learned separately and progressively juxtaposed and combined. The process was progressive and pedagogical: through the accumulation of repeated fragments, the apprenticeship of successive phrases (sung and clapped) and their arrangement, and in the absence of written music, it was possible to include all of the children in the real-time composition of an event.

Later, at the secondary school, a small group of the chorus learned songs, improvised singing on long tones, tried to associate gestures with rhythms, and learned to make sequences out of rhythmic modules. Their brainstorming session on the possible meaning of “lines” was remarkably inventive and even theatrical: crossing a finishing line, going somewhere or saying something and taking it too far (that is, “crossing the line”): “who are you, who do you think you are?” “you shouldn’t feel that way” “why are you here?” “it’s none of your business” “are you still here?” Ms Morpeth demonstrated particular skill at drawing thematic

suggestions out of the group and guiding the tone of the discussion. In the coming weeks, all of the students worked together to enrich, align, and juxtapose all of these fragments to create a concert event to be presented in the Barbican Center.

It goes without saying that we must work very hard to preserve the quality of artistic instruction and our accumulated heritage in performance of the chamber music repertoire. But it seems clear as well, for the survival of all that is essential in the experience of chamber music, that musicians would do well to inform and enrich their skills with these kinds of abilities. Here are already promising models for the future that are bearing fruit.

Dr Evan Rothstein, Chairman, ECMTA

http://www.gsmd.ac.uk/music/principal_study/chamber_music.html

www.gsmd.ac.uk/music/principal_study/leadership.html

www.barbican.org.uk

<p>Note: The next informal gathering of the ECMTA will take place in Amsterdam, Oct 15-17. ECMTA will be the guests of the Amsterdam Conservatory and the Dutch Classical Music Meeting (DCMM), which is organized by Muziekcentrum Nederland. ECMTA members will have free admission to all events. Details and inscriptions on the website: www.ecmta.eu</p>
--