



MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE

CONCERT SERIES

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2015

Lill delivers masterclass in technique and artistry

Sunday, 9 November 2014, 7:30pm
Memorial Hall, Marlborough College

To conclude a memorable Remembrance Sunday, the Marlborough College Concert Series presented the eminent pianist John Lill CBE in concert to a packed Memorial Hall.

Lill is widely recognised as one of the finest pianists alive today and in a significant birthday year which will see him give over 100 concerts, our series was jolly lucky to have secured his services.

Watching a true master at work is an inspirational experience and this concert was a master class in consummate artistry both in a technical and musical capacity.

The new College Steinway was certainly put through its paces in a programme of Mozart, Schumann, Prokofiev, Brahms and Beethoven – perhaps in its biggest solo exposure yet since its arrival last year.

Lill coaxed some sumptuous colours throughout – the pianissimos were perhaps the most arresting, when you could literally hear a pin drop, so captivated was the audience. Humour played a part too – the Schumann hinted at what might be coming and with the arrival of the Prokofiev *Toccatà* we were treated to an extraordinary display of virtuosity which left everyone with a smile on their face – as much in admiration at the wizardry and dexterity as anything else.

Following a spot of Brahms the evening concluded with one of the greatest sonatas ever written, namely Beethoven's *Appassionata*.

Lill is considered to be a Beethoven specialist and it's easy to see why: depth of understanding, rhythmic precision, fine articulation and colour and meticulous use of rubato were just some of the breathtaking qualities brought to bear in this remarkable performance.

A true master at work indeed.

Philip Dukes FGSM Hon ARAM
(Artistic Director)

Sinfonia to close 73rd Season

Series finale combines opera arias and orchestral favourites by Mozart and Beethoven

Southbank Sinfonia, Orchestra in Partnership with Marlborough College return for the final concert of our 2014-15 season.

Every year, the orchestra refreshes its membership with a new cohort of musicians, providing scholarships and bursaries to outstanding graduates from the UK and overseas. During the ensuing months, 32 talented newcomers receive first-hand experience of what it means to become professional musicians today.

Though their visit to Marlborough is usually one of their first public engagements outside the Capital, they are renowned for their flawless performance.

This year, the orchestra returns to our stage with guest Soprano **Ilona Domnich**, described by Opera Now as "A voice of silken beauty."

The first half programme offers a blend of orchestral opera opening with the rarely performed *Trumpet Overture (Op. 101)* by Mendelssohn, followed by the concert aria "Ch'io mi scordi di te?" (K.505) by Mozart.

Scored for soprano, piano obbligato, and orchestra, the latter combines elements of opera with the concerto form and is considered one of Mozart's finest from the genre.

Completed towards the end of December, 1786, it was written as a farewell gift for the English operatic soprano, Anna Selina (Nancy) Storace, as she prepared to leave Austria.

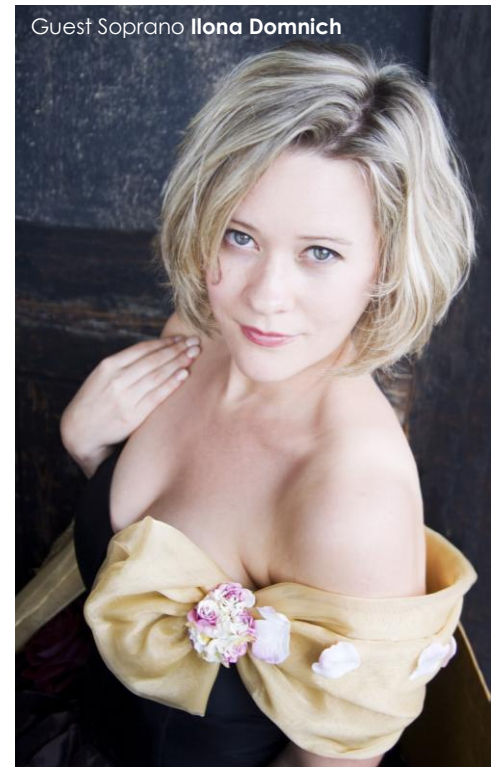
During the five years prior to this date, Storace had enjoyed huge success as prima donna with Emperor Joseph the 2nd's Italian Opera Company, performing world premières for composers such as Salieri and Vicente Martín y Soler.

She was also celebrated for her role as Susanna in Mozart's first production of "Le Nozze di Figaro" (The Marriage of Figaro).

However, just months after her marriage failed with the composer-violinist John Abraham Fisher, her voice collapsed. Rather poignantly, it was

while performing the lead role in her brother's opera "Gli Sposi Malcontenti" (The Unhappily Married Couple)!

Guest Soprano **Ilona Domnich**



Though her voice returned, its range was impaired and both Storace and her brother resolved to return to England.

Mozart accompanied Storace from the piano in her final performance in Vienna, at the Kärntnertortheater (Corinthian Gate Theatre) on February 23, 1787.

A second pairing of overture and song concludes the first half with Mozart's "The Magic Flute," and "O luce di quest'anima" (Oh! star that guid'st my fervent love) from "Linda di Chamounix," the three act opera by Gaetano Donizetti.

After the interval, the concert resumes with Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C minor (Op.67) – one of the best known

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Simon Over (Artistic Director) rehearsing with Southbank Sinfonia



and most performed large scale works in the music repertory. It begins with a distinctive "short-short-short-long" four note sequence, which is repeated.

For such a simple motif, it certainly has given rise to much variation in the way it is performed. Some conductors present the sequence in strict allegro tempo, while others deliver a slower treatment. Still further interpretations include progressively slowing the tempo of each note in turn.

Much too, has been made of the possible meaning of the musical motif. Beethoven's secretary, Anton Schindler, later his biographer, suggested some years after the composer's death, that Beethoven had likened the motif to "Thus Fate knocks at the door!"

However, Schindler is believed to have forged entries in Beethoven's note books and many of his commentaries are derided. An alternative view is put forward by Carl Czerny, a pupil of

Beethoven who claimed "the little pattern of notes had come to [Beethoven] from a yellow hammer's song," heard by the composer while walking in Prater Park, Vienna.

Beethoven though, was prone to making throw-away remarks when questioned about his music, and both interpretations may be considered speculative.

A more mundane conclusion is that "short-short-short-long" rhythms were merely characteristic of the times, and similar examples can be found in works by Haydn, Mozart and others.

The symphony premiered on December 22nd at the Theater an der Wien, in Vienna, on a somewhat epic programme comprising eight works by the composer. Very little critical response ensued – the audience being subdued by extreme cold, the length of the programme (taking four hours to complete), and a poor performance by the orchestra.

When the score was published 18 months later, the music critic E T A Hoffmann described the piece as "one of the most important works of the time."

It brings a fitting crescendo to a season of depth, variety and sheer delight. We hope to welcome you back when the series returns in September. ■

Colliery Band endears sell-out audience

A fine concert series, such as the College one, is packed with the stars of the classical music scene; performers such as Peter Donohoe, Emma Johnson, Evelyn Glennie, the Choir of Wells Cathedral, The Nash Ensemble, The BBC National Orchestra of Wales, to name but a very few, have graced the Chapel and the Memorial Hall.

So to find a northern brass band in the 2014 /15 series raised a few eyebrows in corners of the population of local concert attendees. We are blessed with musically sophisticated audiences who are used to a certain kind of concert experience and in the few days before the event one or two stereo-typical comments floated around, in jest, yes but still floating.

The first clue to what we were to hear in the Memorial Hall on Sunday January 11 came in the form of ticket sales: the concert was a sell-out.

Having played in a number of groups like this the author knew exactly what to expect and rather predictably enjoyed the rather startled reaction of others – 'I told you so' wasn't said, you will be pleased to learn.

**Sunday, 11 January 2015, 3:00pm
Memorial Hall, Marlborough College**

The Grimethorpe Colliery Band gave an astonishing performance in every respect: a great programme full of variety, vim and vigour, led in a deeply understated way by Dr Robert Childs who also endeared himself to the audience with his quirky presentational style.

We had virtuosity in spades in every sense, both individual and collective, and the sense of ensemble was so powerful that it became quite moving. The majority of these players would not be out of place in a professional orchestra and, in fact, the ex-principal cornet player of this group has, at the age of 20, just been appointed Principal Trumpet of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra before completing his music degree.

In a programme of 14 numbers and an encore, it is difficult to pick out notable moments but to ignore the prodigiously skilful soloists would be invidious: Iain Culcross (cornet), Chris



Iain Culcross (cornet),

Gomersall (trombone), Michael Dodd (euphonium), Michael Cavannah (baritone) and Shaun Crowther dazzled us with virtuosity and control.

But for the author the high point was the March from Respighi's 'Pines of Rome' expertly arranged by Howard Snell and superbly executed by the outstanding Grimethorpe Colliery Band – what a way to spend a wet, cold and dull January afternoon.

**Alex Arkwright
Head of Brass, Wind and Percussion
Marlborough College**