

Welcome to York's



ALL SEASONS ORCHESTRA

enjoying music together in York and the surrounding area

- ALL Players - ALL Instruments - ALL Abilities - ALL Seasons -

*“This is an orchestra which makes you realise
you can achieve extraordinary things”*



Photograph courtesy of David Hawkshaw

“so special”

*“an orchestra of
lovely equals”*

*“I keep coming back for the
pleasure of playing together”*

“ASO is a real family”

www.allseasonsorchestra.org.uk

A note from the podium...



Catherine E. Holbrook
Artistic Director
All Seasons Orchestra, York, UK

Inside these pages you will find stories from some of our players to help you get a flavour for what we're about here at the All Seasons Orchestra.

There are contributions from long standing members through to newer additions to the ASO family. Here you will meet professional musicians, experienced players, adult beginners, and rusty returners alike. You will hear the story of our 'accidental leader' and the cellist whose case lining disintegrated on opening after a 30 year gap from playing.

It is my hope that in sharing the journeys of some of our players you will begin to realise that we really do know what it's like to return

to playing after a long time; that we are aware of just how difficult it can be to walk into a room full of people you've never met before; that we understand how rubbish you felt when you joined that snooty orchestra and got glared at when you played a wrong note. Most importantly, we want you to know that however well or badly you think you play your instrument, you really are welcome to come and play with us whenever you want to.

I hope that something in these stories will ignite in you that spark of musical enthusiasm, and help you to find the courage you need to dust off your viola, rescue your french horn from the back of the wardrobe in the spare room, or go out and buy that clarinet you've been longing to have a go at. Whatever stage of your musical journey you are on we very much hope that you will feel able to come along and join in however many or few notes you know!

Catherine



Photograph courtesy of David Holbrook.

A view from the cello section

in conversation with Maki and Kaye



Photograph courtesy of Paul Moseley

Maki

I'd never seen a real cello (apart from in a live concert from a distance) until I got my first cello, bought through eBay in 2012. Robert found Catherine Strachan online and I had my first cello lesson in September 2012. I remember I was quietly fascinated by the spike on the cello (didn't know it extended) and the screw on the bow (didn't know it loosened/tightened). Then my first ASO debut was January 2013, recommended by our lovely Catherine. Thinking about it, how dare I, after only four months of playing; and how generous of the orchestra to let me join. I didn't even know how the orchestra seating worked either. I asked Catherine-the-Conductor and as indicated, I joined the right hand side of the orchestra. I still cringe thinking about it but I used to sit in the front line as Stephen invited me to sit next to him!

Robert took a big role in my cello playing. As you know he used to give me a lift to ASO and when I was late at work, he brought some sandwiches and soup so I could eat them in the car on the way to ASO and he never arranged anything for himself on a Thursday evening so he could give me a lift, bless him. So, I couldn't not go to ASO every week and feel more and more attached to the place.

Kaye

I started at school when our music teacher decided to start an orchestra from scratch. I chose the cello because my mother loved Saint-Saens *The Swan* as played by Pablo Casais.... I started with a terrible school cello til my teacher tracked down one my parents could afford. After school, I wasn't good enough to join a university orchestra so my playing gradually went downhill. I found Catherine via David Hammond at St. Nicks and started lessons again in January 2014. My cello hadn't been out of it's case for 30 years: the case lining disintegrated in a shower of foam rubber bits on Catherine's rug, but the cello was still in good condition and she seemed to think I might be. I still can't quite believe my luck. Now, after reading Lisa's piece, I'm wondering how many more of us have got this feeling of coming back home after being away too long.

Maki

I remember Catherine telling me about you. She said, "She's a really nice, lovely person and she can play. I'm encouraging her to join the ASO". She mentioned that you didn't feel ready and were a bit scared. Anyway, I was delighted to see you at ASO and I'm really glad you have joined us as I have gained a great friend!

A view from the cello section continued...

Kaye

That's exactly how I got drawn in: she told me how nice the conductor was, how it didn't matter if I couldn't play much, how welcoming Judith would be, and then there was this lovely Japanese lady who'd just got a distinction in her Grade 4! It was all true! Though she didn't warn me about your wicked sense of humour and determination to get me into mischief.

I certainly didn't feel ready, and it can still get scary, but when Catherine tilts her eyebrow at you and says "it'll be good for you" you don't argue.

Maki

I think it's nice that we're at a similar level so we can struggle together! I think we both like *Largo* and C major with no accidentals but life at ASO is not like the dream. It is challenging and sometimes quite frustrating what I can't play, but it does make me work harder. Hopefully one day I will be able to play like Judith can!

Kaye

I'm sure you will! I don't know about similar level though, unless you mean that neither of us can guarantee to finish an E Major scale on an E! It's frustrating how much I can't play and how bad my sight reading still is. But it's a great feeling when it goes well, and then I always love the silly bits like when the first violins make us giggle, or one section plays a different piece from everybody else. My top favourite memory is still the time when at the end of a challenging evening we played Mars from Holst's Planets Suite - bar after bar of that relentless rhythm in 5/4 - and when we got to the end you said you'd "lost the will to count"!

Maki

Whatever we say about our playing, our ASO attendance level is pretty good. It's nice that sometimes Judith organises a cello playing gathering at her home with a pub visit too. I think we are an excellent bunch. To me, it is not only enjoying playing in the orchestra but also I love seeing all the friendly faces. The time I started learning the cello is almost the same as the birth of ASO so I feel I am growing up with it!



Photograph courtesy of Cris Marshall.

Cris's Story...



Photograph courtesy of David Hawkshaw

It was Mark who really encouraged me to start playing the violin. I went to the shop to buy a new Grade 1 book as I used to play on my own.

We sat in McDonalds and I heard him talking about orchestras to a young girl. She played in the Saturday String Orchestra at Queen Anne School. He took me there on the Saturday and encouraged me to join in and play in the kids orchestra.

He bought me ceilidh music books and was always asking me to play them for him.

Then I heard about this community orchestra for adults in York and I was there!

I used to think "Oh I don't like classical music" but when you're actually playing... It just makes you feel: "YEAH!"

I go home and i'm humming it.

I just really like it.

ASO really struck a chord with me

Kaitlin's Story...

When I read the message on the ASO website it really struck a chord with me and inspired me to join the orchestra.

Catherine (the Artistic Director)'s writing style on the website reflects the strong ethos of the orchestra. It invites players to join in and encourages them to enjoy the beauty of playing music together.

When I joined the orchestra I was a bit apprehensive, however, one of the flute players, Elaine, was so welcoming that my anxiety dissipated immediately.

You never need feel overwhelmed by a more experienced musician; on the contrary, at ASO players support new-comers with a warm and welcoming attitude.

ASO is a real family

Bev's Story...

I started learning flute as a mature student. I played an oboe when I was in Sixth Form, but sadly I was discouraged at home and gave it up when I started my career as a nurse.

I had a few problems locating a flute teacher initially, until I was recommended my present teacher. She took me on helping me considerably with the early stages of playing the flute. After a while she encouraged me to join an "all ability" orchestra to build my confidence by playing with other musicians who could help me with my timing and sight reading.



Photograph courtesy of David Hawkshaw

A view from the cello section continued...

I was so nervous that I asked my husband Robert to come along with me. He was amazing, and quietly sat at the back of the hall listening to the music and noticing that I could play very little at times. Throughout this period he encouraged and supported me to keep going when I might easily have given up!

Robert continued to stay as my confidence grew, but in the role of “washer-upper” during the refreshment break, so that the members of the orchestra who had traditionally done it, could return sooner to make music.

I am so grateful for his support as he has witnessed my growth in the orchestra amongst other musicians who have accepted me with all my mistakes and “faux pas”.

For me, and I hope for all the other members of the orchestra, ASO is a real “family” making Thursday evenings enjoyable and fun. Robert still comes even though his own work load in the community has grown for he too enjoys the many friends we have made together.



I joked “Maybe I could play the triangle”!?

Caroline's Story...

I first found myself playing percussion following a chance remark to a friend who was at that time playing violin in the orchestra. I said how much I would like to play in an orchestra, but with only singing and piano experience it was never likely to happen. I joked “Maybe I could play the triangle”. My friend suggested I do exactly that.

At my first session I was made very welcome by Catherine and the orchestra. We tackled Stephanie Cant's *Machines* - a baptism of fire for me, banging a teaspoon on a cup for the triangle, and a wooden spoon on a table top for a drum, and my first lesson in counting bars! Having sung in choirs most of my life, and spent many years learning the piano, reading music did not present me with any problems. The challenge was (and still is) to come in at the right place - a challenge facing every orchestral player of course.

Not long after my first session Catherine presented me with some roto-toms - drums which can be tuned like timpani, but which (unlike timpani) are easily transportable. These introduced me to the role of the timpanist in larger orchestral works such as symphonies, an aspect of percussion that has given me great pleasure ever since.

From the outset I thoroughly enjoyed being a part of the orchestra. I have now been playing percussion for about seven years, contributing to a wide variety of music, from small pieces to large, classical to modern, always in an encouraging and friendly environment.

Some works in the repertoire present more of a challenge than others - the fear of coming in with a loud crash at the wrong place is ever-present - but the satisfaction and sense of achievement to be gained from successfully playing through a major symphony is indescribable!

Paul's Story...

Come and play Beethoven's Symphony No.3 'Eroica'

**Players of all instruments and abilities are invited to join us
for this opportunity to play one of Beethoven's best known symphonies.**

This was the announcement which first drew my attention to the All Seasons Orchestra (ASO). But it aroused a lot of questions in my mind... Could it possibly be true – that I could walk in off the street, without any credentials or audition, and that we could get right through the Eroica, not exactly an easy piece, on the basis of just an afternoon's rehearsal? Yes, it could.

But surely there would be a downside. I would get glared at by fellow-members of the orchestra, and the conductor too, if I played a wrong note, or came in at the wrong time, as was bound to happen given my lack of experience. And if I asked a question, like 'where are we?' (in the score), or worse still suggested that the piece might go a bit faster, or slower, I was bound to get trodden on, hard.

No, none of that happened. Better still, if a particular passage went specially well, people would take the trouble to tell me. And so I have stayed in the orchestra 'happily ever after', still overwhelmed by the fact that such an exciting and original, but also risky, idea as the All Seasons Orchestra can actually be made to work.



I should give a bit of background. I am a very amateur clarinettist who, more than forty years ago in secondary school and at uni, played in quite a lot of concerts. But by the time I got to university, things had become seriously elitist – no point in trying to get into the Cambridge university orchestra unless you were already in the National Youth Orchestra.

So I drifted off into earning a living and playing occasional chamber music. Very pleasant, but not the same thing as playing in an orchestra. But how to get into an amateur orchestra? Most were impossible to get into – not so much because they were elitist, à la Cambridge, but because they were stable clubs of people who, having once got together, stayed together for decades, and only held auditions in the rare event that someone moved away from the area. And even if I had managed to get and get through an audition, I didn't really fancy playing serving an apprenticeship playing second clarinet for ten years before being allowed to play solos.

So imagine the shock when I saw the ASO's advertisement saying – come when you want, don't worry if you can't come, ability no object.

And open-access really means open-access. If you have a passion for music, then whether you are a young mum or an electrician, a barrister or a nurse, you will enjoy playing with the ASO.

The spirit of tolerance and encouragement I have found at ASO are not the only things which make this orchestra so special.

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Paul's Story continued . . .

ASO plays a very wide range of often quite challenging music – not only Beethoven's 3rd Symphony, but also his 5th and even the 7th (difficult enough to frighten off most amateur orchestras) - and it's not only the classical lollipops, though there are plenty of those too, but also early music, folk music, works influenced by music from around the world, and a good deal of new and unfamiliar pieces, some of the most fascinating bits of it by lesser known composers.

One year we gave a concert in Strensall Garrison Church, in aid of North Yorkshire Music Therapy, taking some risks and performing some of the music on the basis of only one rehearsal! But those whom I talked to thought the risks came off.

We are constantly experimenting and trying out new things. As if running a new kind of orchestra wasn't enough, Catherine, the principal conductor, decided to hold a conductors' training course last summer. And so we discovered Hannah, who now periodically also conducts us.

This is an orchestra which makes you realise you can achieve extraordinary things. So, this is a rare thing – an orchestra which is pushing out the envelope in all kinds of ways, but at the same time extremely friendly and totally accessible. I still can't quite understand how it manages to happen, but that is not important. Come along any Thursday evening: you will certainly have a lot of fun, and it may change your life, as it changed mine.



An Orchestra of Lovely Equals

Lisa's Story . . .

Twenty years ago my mum cleared out her loft and gave me the last bits of my stuff back, including my neglected violin. It was more or less intact, give or take a mysteriously missing tuning peg. A colleague did a few running repairs. I played a bit for the first time in a long time and was surprised to find how much was still in my fingers but I wasn't really enjoying the solo playing much.

Remembering my school days of orchestras, quartets and string groups, I told my partner that I needed an amateur group to play with. He came home a few weeks later with a flyer for a new open access orchestra starting in York and my best friend insisted I go. So lots of little nudges from friends and family got me through the door - a bit uncertain and a bit late (nothing's changed there), but sitting at the back of the second violins and ready to play.

I've continued through nineteen years of Thursday practices, through changes of name, faces and committees.

I keep coming back for the pleasure of playing together. In my day job I work mainly on my own in an office, and almost entirely cognitively: thinking, reading, writing and explaining. Orchestral playing is collaborative, physical and creative. It uses skills that I don't normally use and takes me out of my ordinary experiences. This is all enabled by the All Seasons ethos of enjoyment and inclusivity. Although our conductor Catherine makes it look easy, it definitely is not. Her spirit, encouragement and hard work make our orchestra inimitable.

Over the life of All Seasons Orchestra I have found fantastic friends and have accidentally become the usual so-called leader in an orchestra of lovely equals, as well as absent-mindedly leaving my violin behind at a playday.

I have learned from beginners still getting their fingers around the notes and from the truly gifted who lift everyone's game. All Seasons Orchestra gives us all space to make the best sound we can on the night.

I'd Never Played in a Classical Group Before

Matt's Story...

I play double bass in the All Seasons Orchestra and have been coming for about 3 years before the pandemic hit.

Having played bass guitar for years in bands I decided to start learning the double bass, primarily to play swing jazz music. However, I knew that it would be a good idea to have classical lessons in order to start out with good technique, and I have always liked classical music.

Anyhow... Fast forward a couple of years and I was scheduled to take my grade 3 practical exam. Unfortunately, my teacher was unavailable to provide the piano accompaniment but she knew of someone who could fill in; "be careful though" my teacher said, "she'll probably try and get you to join her orchestra!". The pianist in question was none other than Catherine Holbrook, the Artistic Director from the All Seasons Orchestra and, sure enough, she did persuade me to come and have a go.

I was a bit apprehensive about coming at first because I was only grade 3 and not great at reading music; and I'd never played in a classical group before. I came nonetheless and have been coming most weeks ever since!

I love the relaxed atmosphere and the focus on the enjoyment of playing live music. I find playing in the orchestra a great way of improving my understanding of music, in a way that is not possible purely from listening to a piece.

I also enjoy learning about the practicalities of the other instruments and have a new appreciation of what it takes to make orchestral music sounds good.

I would recommend anyone who has even a basic ability and an enjoyment of music to come and join in. There's always great cakes and biscuits at the parties too!



Gordon's Story...

I started to play violin at the age of 11 when I went to secondary school, and whereas most people simply gradually fell by the wayside, I kept playing (to no great standard) until I left aged 18.

I then moved to Southampton for a twelve month course and played and sang four nights a week. After this I simply gave up playing as I became more interested in other distractions.

I never ever did any exam work at all, except for doing Grade 5 theory - the peripatetic violin teacher had entered me through the school. I was not studying for music GCE, so the music teacher was astounded when he came to find me one day to tell me I'd passed!

So what made me re-start to play at age 63?!

Well, I had always sung in chamber choirs, mostly early music (unaccompanied) and one of the choirs in which I sang went into a joint venture (exchange) with a choir from Calabria in Southern Italy. They came over to Leamington where we sang together, one of the pieces being Faure's Requiem, which has a violin solo. One of the lady singers from Italy was to play the solo; but did not want to bring her violin over so I offered to lend her mine which I had just had restored for some reason.

I remember our conductor was a bit snooty about it enquiring what sort of condition it was in and was it up to scratch...

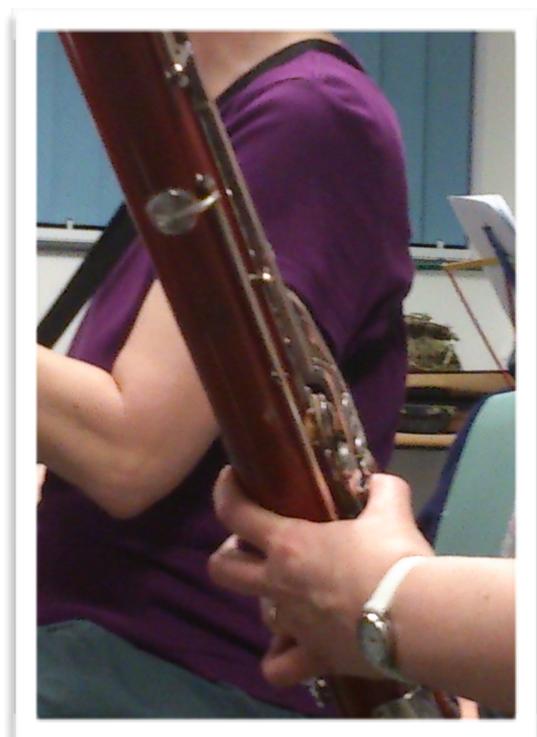
Anyway, we all have to indulge in conductors' foibles, so I dropped it off one evening before the concert at her hotel so she could practice. The concert went well and returning the violin to me later she said it was the finest toned instrument she had ever played. So I thought well in that case perhaps I had better start to play again!

So I began taking lessons. I remember my violin teacher being somewhat amused when I said I only wanted to play violin if I could do exams, and that I wanted to start at Grade 1. I think I sat grades 1,2, and 3 in my first year and then 4 and 5 in the next year.

One of the advantages of doing exams when you are in your 60s is you can have a bit of banter with the examiner! I remember in one aural he played a piece of music and said what did you think of that? I replied "not a lot did someone actually get paid for writing it; but you played it beautifully" .

We then moved up to Yorkshire 10 years ago and I found a new local teacher, where I did grades 6, 7 & 8. I remember an initial problem being that I could not progress without having passed Grade 5 theory, which I had to discuss with the examining board, since they insisted they had all the old records and mine wasn't among them. When they asked when I sat the exam and I replied 50 years ago, they admitted that their records did not go back quite that far.

Fortunately I found an ageing certificate up the loft and they seemed happy with that so I was able to continue. Having done grade 8 I then stopped having lessons and told the teacher I wanted to get some experience of playing in a group, which is why I joined the All Seasons Orchestra!



A Final Word of Thanks

When we began putting this booklet together I had no idea what a profoundly moving experience I would find it, and huge thanks must go to Paul (clarinet) for all of his work in collecting people's stories and whose idea this booklet was.

This "orchestra of lovely equals" really has been on a journey together. We have played a huge quantity of music of incredibly diverse and varied styles. Together we have supported one another through numerous personal storms. We have said goodbye to dear friends and made many new ones along the way, we have laughed together and cried together, thankfully mostly the former.

Through our shared love of music we have created not just an orchestra but a family of the best kind. A family based on respect, encouragement, care, consideration and mutual support. It really is a privilege to be able to work with you all and to see the way that everyone's presence in the orchestra contributes something unique and valuable to the overall whole. And, we have a whole heap of fun.

I love the spontaneous gatherings and chamber groups that have sprung up over the years; the bringing of cream cakes or ice lollies 'just because'; the sharing of lifts; the committee meetings with tea and cake; the sellotape and music sorting parties; the friendships, support and encouragement, not to mention the simple joy of making music together. Thank you all for humouring my inner geek when I get a little bit overexcited about some tiny obscure musical detail!

What shines through these stories time and time again is the important role of our friends and relatives. Oftentimes they remain very much in the background but without them we couldn't or wouldn't do half of the things we manage to do. These wonderful people are so crucial in cheering us on, chauffeuring us around, bringing us our forgotten sandwiches and the instrument we somehow managed to leave on the sofa when we left the house case in hand (yes really!). Thank you to the babysitters and other halves who put the children to bed so we can come out to play.

It is the support and encouragement of others that helps us to persevere with playing the instruments we love, even when we're struggling with difficult rhythms, or beating ourselves up about that missed entry, fretting over that passage that ties our fingers in knots and cursing those wretched F double sharps! So, I'd like to take the opportunity to say a huge thank you to each and every one of our unseen supporters, past and present, who make all things at All Seasons Orchestra possible.

And of course last but not least thank you to everyone over the years who has responded to the invitation to come out to play.

Together we are the All Seasons Orchestra.