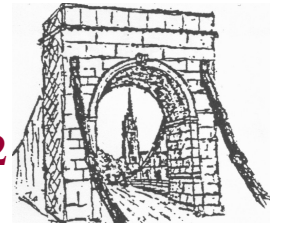




# MARLOW U3A MUSIC APPRECIATION GROUP

37<sup>th</sup> Newsletter: December 2011/January 2012



**A Happy New Year to you all!**

## Preamble

Brian opened the December music session by thanking all those members who had wished him a speedy recovery from the hospital treatment he had been receiving. He went on to explain that the first part of the morning would involve an explanation by Alastair Heald of how the harp had developed over many years, whilst the second part would – it was hoped – be a very entertaining musical session.

## Matters of the Harp

We were delighted to welcome 17 year old Alastair Heald, who has been playing the harp since he was 11 (although his priority instrument is the violin). Alastair described the development of the harp from ancient times to modern day. He also performed a variety of music on the two harps that he'd brought along and showed us how they work. He set the scene by performing

*Noche de fiesta* and by playing a track played on an Ethiopian harp (from a CD entitled *Éthiopiennes Vol.11: The Harp of King David*) to give an idea of the sound of an ancient harp.

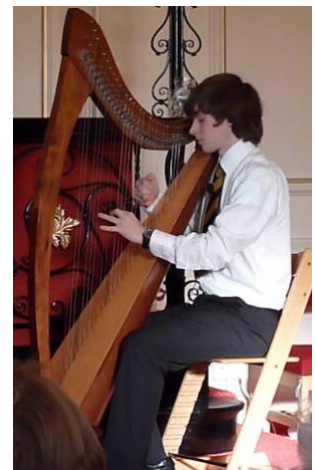


The Harp is probably the oldest string instrument. There are many examples of harps in ancient carvings and paintings. Some of these date back to 5,000 years ago from the ancient civilisations of Assyria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Phoenicia and Greece. There is even evidence of a harp-like instrument in rock paintings found in France from around 15,000 BC. It is likely that the first harps were made from hunters'

bows. This image shows various styles of Egyptian harp, including one designed to be played while carried on the shoulder. These harps may have had up to 19 strings (the two that Alastair brought along have 34 strings and 47 strings).

A **harp** has strings which run away from the sound board and they are exposed on both sides. Four-sided, triangular, and bow-shaped harps were common in the ancient world. On the other hand, a **lyre** has strings which run across the sound board and often go over a bridge. The lyre is thought to have been invented by the Sumerians around 3200 B.C. 'Harp' is believed to be an Anglo Saxon word which means 'to pluck'. 'Harp' or 'harpa' was used in the 13<sup>th</sup> century to describe a triangular shaped string instrument. It is thought that the harp was brought to Europe and ultimately to the British Isles from Ancient Egypt by the Phoenicians who were great traders.

Alastair played examples of music from the Celtic tradition, including *O'Carolan's Air*, on the Salvi Aida version of a clarsach harp (*right*). The Celtic harp or clarsach as it was known in Ireland and Scotland from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries was a wire strung harp. However, Alastair's harp has wire strings in the bottom 1½ octaves, gut in the



middle two octaves and nylon in the top octave. He then played a CD track called *Ayrshire lasses, Dance of the Dead*, featuring a Gut strung harp, a Bray harp (that has L-shaped wire pegs that vibrate causing a buzzing sound), and a wire strung clarsach harp.

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the harping tradition in Ireland and Scotland was largely extinct. This was due to the Anglicisation of Irish and Scottish cultures, the increased popularity of step dancing and the fiddle, and the inability of the harp to play musical accidentals required in classical music during the baroque era. Because it had been largely an oral tradition, very little music survives. Alastair performed one further example of a traditional Scottish piece *Cockle Gatherer* (Hebridean dance song) and a Welsh piece, the well-known *Ash Grove*.

On the smaller harps, levers are used to raise the pitch of a single string by one semitone by slightly bending or pinching the string. The triple harp has three layers of strings: two sets of natural strings on the outside and a set of sharps and naturals in the middle. We heard a piece called *Hiraeth* played by Eleri Darkins on the triple harp.

The Cross Strung Harp is another development enabling accidentals to be played. One set of strings was tuned to C major and the other to F# pentatonic. The cross over in the middle means that the harpist can play all the notes in both hands in the part of the harp that is most resonant. The first cross strung harp was developed in 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain but this had died out by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Later the French developed a cross strung harp to cope with the demand for chromaticism in the romantic period. This harp was based on the pedal harp in its physical build.

The Single Action Pedal Harp was first developed in 1720. Single action meant that it could raise the pitch of certain strings by a semitone. This made it possible for the harp to be played in most keys. This harp was operated by metal catching hooks on the strings. This idea developed into metal plates in the 1750s and by 1792 rotating disks were in use. These disks turned to come into contact making the string shorter and therefore sharper. In 1808 Sebastian Erard registered his first patent for the Double Action Pedal Harp, which has two sets of rotating disks that come in contact with the string so that the harp can play every note and almost every key. The disks are controlled by the pedals which move metal rods in the column of the harp. Sadly the pedals are not in sequential order from A to G! Alastair demonstrated the use of the pedals while playing the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> movements of Clementi's Sonatina in C.

The harp can be made up of as many as eight different woods. The sound board is usually made of Sitka Spruce (same wood as used for the sound board of a piano). Other woods that are used include willow, birch, pine and maple.

Alastair ended by demonstrating various techniques that can be used on a harp, including harmonics, *etouffée*, glissandos (which Alastair demonstrated by performing a piece called *Dance of the Little Fish*), and *pres de le table*.



Judging by the comments afterwards, we were all impressed not just by Alastair's musical talent but also by his ability to present calmly and clearly, maintaining our interest and keeping us all entertained throughout. We are grateful to Aldenham School for allowing Alastair to present to us during school hours, and also for allowing him to use the larger harp (a Salvi Daphne 47 stringed Student Edition with Extended sound board, *left*), which belongs to the school. We have written to them accordingly. Aldenham School places considerable emphasis on the value of music, and it is heartening to know that the youngsters at Aldenham have such valuable opportunities and encouragement.

Note: Alastair's "just giving" web page is <http://www.justgiving.com/Alastair-Heald> or you can go to [www.justgiving.com](http://www.justgiving.com) and search for Alastair Heald as a friend.

## Anything Goes!

We ended our year with a series of performances by members of the group, with Jim as the MC. Rachel, Jenny and Liz got the music off to a lively and colourful start with their rendition of *Three Little Maids* from *The Mikado*. This was followed by Brian and Keith in *The Gasman Cometh* by Flanders & Swann (it contained some extra mishaps that weren't in Flanders's script!), Tony and Colin in *Summertime* by Gershwin, and Brian and Peter's tribute to Flanagan and Allen. Peter's lyrics gave two of the original songs extra verses with a local or seasonal context: hence *Underneath the Chain Bridge* (i.e. suspension bridge) and *Maybe it's because it's December Now (and Marlow is all aglow)*. John Willis accompanied on the Bechstein piano.



The songs were interspersed with monologues by two invited guests: Lilly Emerson gave us *The Twelve days of Christmas* and *Aerobics*, whilst Roy Souster (who entertained us last year with a funny rendition of the Halleluiah Chorus) gave us *Jest before Christmas* and *The Oldies' Tea Dance*. For the Finale, all of the performers came together to lead us all in *Bring Me Sunshine*, which Morecambe and Wise made so famous.

Video clips of some of the performances can be found on YouTube. The links are:

Three Little Maids: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ab2KUQ7OJAg>

Gasman Cometh: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-nJXxyNy6I>

Underneath the Chain Bridge: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UfcK1kRUWQ>

Maybe it's because it's December Now: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7VHh\\_CDIbs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7VHh_CDIbs)

Bring Me Sunshine: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGGY-CSTuil>

or you can type **MARLOW MAG SONGS** into the YouTube search box. Also, see two of Alastair Heald's performances on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHZfo4N8uzE> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-U1oS65pz8>.

## Questionnaire

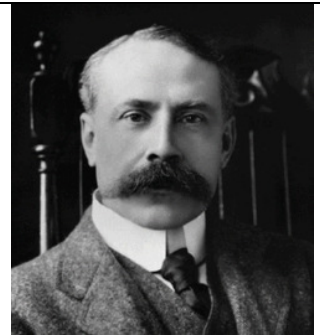
We will be circulating a questionnaire, seeking your advice and suggestions including:

1. A potential additional session in August 2012: a concert given by young musician(s).
2. Redesign of our web site (<http://www.marlowu3a.org.uk/id12.html>)

We hope that you will bring along your completed questionnaires to the next meeting. Alternatively, please return your comments directly to Keith.

## Future Programme

Date	Provisional Programme
19 Jan	<p><b>Elgar: The Early Years</b> Sometimes we are given the impression that Edward Elgar suddenly burst onto the music scene in 1899/1900 with his <i>Enigma Variations</i>, <i>Sea Pictures</i> and <i>The Dream of Gerontius</i>. Yet during his struggles for national recognition he had already composed many fine works. Keith will trace Elgar's musical development from the 1870s to 1898, including chamber works, songs, orchestral music and two massive choral works, while explaining some of the obstacles that he encountered.</p> <p><b>Music Inspired by Sir Walter Scott</b> Like Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, the novels and poems of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) provided a great deal of inspiration for composers of Romantic music in Britain and in Europe. Such composers included Rossini, Marschner, Boieldieu, Schubert, Sullivan, MacCunn, Donizetti, Berlioz and Bizet. Guest speaker David Church will illustrate this with his own selection from this extensive repertoire.</p>
16 Feb	<p><b>Piano Transcriptions</b> Alan will present some examples of piano transcriptions of vocal music, ranging from Baroque to Romantic. The aim is to show how different pianists have transcribed the music and preserved the relationship between the vocal line and the accompaniment.</p> <p><b>The Violin in Jazz: From New Orleans to the present day</b> (presented by Brian) and a presentation (by Roger Freeman one of our MAG members) on the construction of a Violin)</p>
15 March	<p><b>The Operas of Giuseppe Verdi (continued)</b> (presented by Nina)</p> <p><b>Leonard Bernstein: Bridging the gap between concert hall and Broadway</b> Leonard Bernstein was an American composer, conductor, pianist and teacher noted for his accomplishments in both classical and popular music. His special gift of bridging the gap between the concert hall and Broadway made him one of the most glamorous musical figures of his day. His fame derived principally from his long tenure as conductor and musical director of the New York Philharmonic and from the tremendous success of <i>West Side Story</i> (presented by Jim)</p>



Please note the above dates in your diary. We look forward to seeing you at (or soon after) 9.45am on 19<sup>th</sup> January at the URC.

### Waiting List

Because of constraints relating to refreshments and toilet facilities, there is a limit on numbers and we are managing a waiting list. Potential new members should contact Brian in the first instance. Could regular members please contact Brian in advance if you cannot attend a particular meeting, so that a chance can be given for others to come along.

## 2012 Anniversaries

Anniversary of Birth	Anniversary of Death
John Bull (1562–1628) 450 years	Giovanni Gabrieli (1554–1612) 400 years
John Stanley (1712–1786) 300 years	Francesco Geminiani (1687–1762) 250 years
Frederick Delius (1862–1934) 150 years	Jan Ladislav Dussek (1760–1812) 200 years
Edward German (1862–1936) 150 years	Jules Massenet (1842–1912) 100 years
Claude Debussy (1862–1918) 150 years	Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912) 100 years
John Cage (1912–1992) 100 years	Jacques-François Ibert (1890–1962) 50 years
	John Ireland (1879–1962) 50 years

### U3A Group Bookings for Concerts/Events

- ♪ As mentioned by Alastair, Sarah Goss ([www.sarahgoss.com](http://www.sarahgoss.com)) will give a concert of harp music on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> February at 7.30pm at St Mary's Church, Church Lane, Wendover, HP22 6NL. The concert is in aid of Ripple Africa ([www.rippleafrica.org](http://www.rippleafrica.org)) and the newly refurbished St Mary's Church ([www.stmaryswendover.org.uk](http://www.stmaryswendover.org.uk)). Carol Rumens has kindly offered to arrange a minibus for those who would like to travel together to this concert. If you would like to go as a Marlow U3A MAG group, please contact Carol on 01628 629975 or email [carol.rumens@sky.com](mailto:carol.rumens@sky.com). Tickets (glass of wine or soft drink included in price of adult ticket) £10 Adults, £2 for under 18s. If you wish to book individually you can contact [mheald@uk2.net](mailto:mheald@uk2.net) or call Margaret Heald on 01296 622707.
- ♪ Further to the announcement in last month's Newsletter, Jenny, Brian and Averil are looking into potential bookings and arrangements for the Mahler Symphony No.2 concert at the Royal Festival Hall on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2012. Some group members have expressed interest. If you haven't already done so, please contact Brian immediately if you are interested in booking as final decisions on this will be made shortly.

Bookings and transport for the following events are being arranged by the Theatre Group:

- ♪ Philharmonia Orchestra playing a concert performance of Yeoman of the Guard. 3pm on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> April at Royal Festival Hall. Leaving Marlow at 12 noon. Cost £22. Tricia Kilner-Smith (01628 471284) is taking bookings for this concert.
- ♪ Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the Royal Albert Hall. Evening performance on Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> May. A Gala concert to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Performances by Lesley Garret, Nicola Benedetti, Alison Balsom and Emma Johnson. Includes music by Haydn, Piazzolla, Ravel, Mozart and Vaughan Williams. Full programme on RAH website or from Angela Walker who is taking bookings. Her phone number is 01628 486134. The cost will be £32.

### Other Concerts/Events

Other local events in the next few weeks include:

- ♪ Marlow Jazz Club have regular events on Tuesdays (10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> January, 14<sup>th</sup> February, 6<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> March). See <http://www.marlowjazz.co.uk/>. 8.30pm at the Royal British Legion Hall, Marlow.
- ♪ Oxford Philomusica Piano Quintet: quintets by Vaughan Williams and Schubert. 7.30pm on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> January at Norden Farm, Maidenhead.
- ♪ Rising Stars from Chetham's School of Music will perform at 7.45pm on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> January at Beaconsfield High School, Wattleton Road, Beaconsfield.
- ♪ Slough Philharmonic Society: Concert for Chorus and Orchestra. Soloists include tenor **Greg Tassell** (whom we heard at Hatchlands). 7.30pm on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> January at School Hall, Eton College.

- ♪ High Wycombe Music Centre's Gala Concert will feature a variety of bands, orchestras and choirs performing a varied programme of musical styles. 4pm on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> January at Wycombe Swan.
- ♪ Marlow Community Choir Winter Concert: Gounod's *St. Cecilia Mass* and Parry's *I Was Glad*. 7.30pm on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> January at All Saint's Church, High Wycombe.
- ♪ Mozart birthday concert by St John's Chamber Orchestra. 11.45 on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> January at Norden Farm, Maidenhead.
- ♪ Russian State Ballet of Siberia perform *Giselle* (2 February), *Sleeping Beauty* (3 February) and *Swan Lake* (4 February) at Wycombe Swan. Thurs-Sat at 7.30pm plus Saturday matinee at 2.30pm.
- ♪ Pyatt/Gould/McCawley Horn Trio play Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann and Brahms. 7.45pm on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> February at Beaconsfield High School, Wattleton Road, Beaconsfield.
- ♪ Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at Wycombe Swan. Mendelssohn/Mozart/Elgar. 7.30pm on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> February 2012.
- ♪ Music for a Royal Occasion: The Festival Chorus marks the Queen's Diamond Jubilee year with festive music including Purcell's 1685 anthem for James II's Coronation and Mathias's acclaimed tribute for the Silver Jubilee in 1977. 3pm on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> February at Norden Farm, Maidenhead.
- ♪ City of London Sinfonia play works by JS Bach, CPE Bach, Mendelssohn and Gorecki. 7.30pm on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> March at All Saint's Church, High Wycombe.

★ If you would like to feature any events of interest herein, please email the details to Keith ★

Happy listening!

Brian (484099, [brian.humphrey2@ntlworld.com](mailto:brian.humphrey2@ntlworld.com)) and Keith (891507, [keithrachel@hotmail.com](mailto:keithrachel@hotmail.com))

P.S. Don't forget that you can view what we have done at previous sessions at our web site:  
<http://www.marlowu3a.org.uk/id12.html>