

# STONELEIGH YOUTH ORCHESTRA NEWSLETTER

## July 2011

**Dear Friends, Parents and Players,**

The 2010/11 season is rapidly drawing to a close, with our mini-Tour and concert in Arundel Cathedral on 24<sup>th</sup> July. I'm delighted to report that it has been an excellent season for Stoneleigh. This newsletter is intended to provide an update to the Stoneleigh community on various developments this year, together with a look ahead to what we have in store for 2011/12.

### **Membership**

Our membership levels are very healthy, with 68 player in the MO and 49 in the TO. The combined membership of 117 compares with 100 at the same time last year. While this puts us very close to our longstanding target of 120 players, we are still below the 80 members we would like to have in the MO. We also have several instruments where we would like to add players, notably trombone, horn, viola, percussion and double bass. We have had a total of 53 new players join the SYO (18 in the MO and 35 in the TO) during 2010/11, compared to 29 in 2009/10, making it a particularly active year for auditions, and only 11 leave during the course of the year. This has meant that we have more than made up for the players we lose at the end of each season. We are particularly pleased about the expansion of the TO which bodes well for the future. This has allowed us to raise the minimum suggested level for TO membership from grade 3 to grade 4, giving the conductors a narrower range of experience with which to work.

We are delighted with the level of interest being shown in Stoneleigh, which we believe can be attributed to the step up in our marketing efforts over the last two years. We undertake two mailings each year to more than 200 music directors at schools in our catchment area, as well as to 300 music teachers. We have also raised the external profile of Stoneleigh through posters as well as through advertisements in programmes for the National Children's Orchestra, Marryat Players and Sutton Music Festival. In the run up to the September auditions this year, we are displaying a banner in some prominent locations in Wimbledon and Roehampton.

Our most effective marketing tool, of course, remain the players themselves and their parents, and I would urge you to continue to spread the word about Stoneleigh and encourage people you know who might be interested in joining us to get in touch to find out more about joining the orchestra. We will be holding auditions for new players on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> and Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> September. As a reminder, we offer a discount off your subscription fees for one year (£50 for the MO and £30 for the TO) for each new member you introduce, and who stays for a year, as an incentive to bring in new members.

### **Orchestra developments**

Over the past year, we have been able to introduce a number of enhancements to the musical experience the players enjoy at Stoneleigh. The key developments have been:

- **Dedicated concert venues:** the RCM, RAM and 450 Hall at Hampton are all among the best concert halls in London, and performing in these locations has been a wonderful experience for the players
- **Professional soloists:** we have been fortunate to be able to work with three outstanding soloists (Oliver Coates, Mathieu van Bellen and Christopher Herrick)
- **Master classes:** Oliver Coates and Mathieu van Bellen held master classes for cellists and violinists respectively, which were greatly enjoyed by the players who participated, as well as by the parents who observed
- **Sectionals:** we have added an extra violin tutor for the MO sectionals, and now hold two sectionals each term for the TO. The TO also benefited from a violin tutor who worked with the players for much of this term
- **MO mentors:** we encouraged MO players to come along to one or two TO rehearsals last term to help out the TO players in their section. This seemed to be appreciated by the TO players and enjoyed by the MO members. I hope that some MO players who have a service requirement to fulfil for e.g. Duke of Edinburgh's will consider doing this on a formal basis next season.

### **Orchestra Plans for 2011/12**

We have some exciting plans for next season, some of which I can share with you now.

Our December 11<sup>th</sup> concert at the RCM will feature the Elgar Cello Concerto, for which we are delighted to welcome back one of our former players, Daniel Benn, who will be the soloist. The MO will also be performing Dvorak's New World Symphony and Berlioz, Hungarian March. The TO will be performing Mozart's Overture to The Abduction from the Seraglio and Dvorak's Slavonic Dance in G.

For the March 25<sup>th</sup> concert at the RAM, the MO will be performing Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, and we are extremely pleased that Maria Marchant, whom many of you will remember was our soloist for Rachmaninov's Variations on a Theme of Paganini in March 2010, will once again be the pianist. The MO will also be tackling Mahler, Symphony No. 1.

The July 8<sup>th</sup> MO concert programme will comprise Elgar, Cockaigne; Wagner, Siegfried Idyll; and Kodaly, Variations on a Hungarian Folk Song.

Stoneleigh's President, Richard Watkins, who is a former SYO player and one of the world's leading horn players (he was Principal Horn of the Philharmonia for 11 years), has kindly agreed to come to one of our rehearsals next term to take a Horn Master class, and also talk about his work which nowadays includes recording the music for many of the blockbuster Hollywood films.

Finally, we will be doing a Tour in continental Europe from July 20 to July 28, the dates for which have been planned to enable us to be back for the start of the London Olympics for those players (and parents!) who want to be here for that event. This will be Adrian's last Tour with Stoneleigh, so we hope as many members as possible (as well as recent leavers) will participate. We will try to have details firmed up early next term.

## Finance

The orchestra's finances are in good shape, and I am delighted that we have been able to undertake all the enhancements I have mentioned from our existing resources. For 2011/12, our subscription rates will remain at £400 for the MO and £180 for the TO (with discounts for siblings). This will be the fifth year in succession that the subscriptions are unchanged.

We have been able to do this partly because of the increased membership which has raised the overall income from subscriptions. However, it is also very largely due to some generous support we have received in the form of donations from a number of parents, for which we are extremely grateful.

We have also re-launched our Friends scheme which has already gone much of the way towards achieving our initial target of funding the additional TO sectionals we have introduced. The TO is hugely important to Stoneleigh's future: some 40% of the current MO have come up from the ranks of the TO, hence it makes good sense to invest in giving the TO players the best possible musical experience. I hope very much that we will be able to expand the membership of the Friends further over the course of the next year. If anyone would like further details about the scheme, please contact Julia Mackinder ([julia.mackinder@btinternet.com](mailto:julia.mackinder@btinternet.com)).

We will face a tougher year financially in 2011/12, as we have the cost of the Tour (which historically we have tried to subsidise to keep the costs down to a manageable level). In addition, the Government has just moved the goalposts on Gift Aid. Historically, we have been able to re-claim Gift Aid on all membership subscriptions from those people who have told us they are eligible. From 1<sup>st</sup> September, we will be required to allocate part of the subscription to the tuition the players receive from the conductors, and this portion will no longer qualify for Gift Aid. We are still working through the financial implications of this, but I fear it inevitably means we will lose a significant amount of revenue which we will have to work hard to make up.

There are various other ways that parents can also help Stoneleigh which are relatively costless, and I would urge you to consider these:

- **Easy fund-raising:** This website ([www.easyfundraising.org.uk](http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk)) allows you to nominate a charity, and each time you shop online at most UK retailers' websites (including sites such as Amazon), SYO will receive a percentage of what you spend if you access their website through the easyfundraising portal. There is no additional cost to you.
- **Nectar:** Stoneleigh has a dedicated Nectar account, which can accrue points from a wide range of entities (Sainsbury, BP, Dolland & Aitchison, British Gas). Caroline Scollick ([scollick33@o2.co.uk](mailto:scollick33@o2.co.uk)) has a supply of cards for anyone who would like one.
- **Gift Aid:** Given the amount of Gift Aid we will be receiving on each subscription will be lower going forward, it is very important that as many people as possible select the Gift Aid option when you fill in your membership forms each year.

If anyone has any suggestions for other ways of raising money or attracting sponsorship, please let me know.

**Volunteers needed!**

We are extremely proud of the fact that SYO is a parent-run organisation, and I am really grateful to all the parents who help out during the year, particularly at the concerts. However, as players move on to university, we also lose Committee members, hence we always need to find additional people to join the Committee. I would like to add two TO and two MO parents to the Committee in September, so if anyone is interested in helping in this way, please get in touch with me and I can let you know what is involved – it does not have to be an onerous time commitment, and the current Committee members will (I hope!) tell you that it is actually a lot of fun!

Thank you for your support this year. As a result of all the hard work of Adrian, Lindsay and Dan, it has been a wonderful season, and I hope you will share my excitement about the year ahead.

As always, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me if you have feedback about what we are doing or ideas about how we can improve. I attend most rehearsals for at least part of the time, and am readily contactable via email and telephone.

I hope you all have a wonderful summer and I look forward to seeing those players who are re-auditioning on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> September, and everyone for our first rehearsal on 11<sup>th</sup> September.

**Julian Hardwick**