

## SYS REPORT 2010-11

This was to be the start of an interesting year both for SYS and for me too with no indication of the state of affairs that would exist during and at the end of the academic year.

We started as per usual in September with a largely new orchestra and several players found themselves moved into the hot seats with the attendant responsibilities of playing the exposed solos. All were to rise wonderfully to the challenge as did the new members who had moved up from the junior ensembles. Strings were as strong as ever, woodwind places were filled with the usual exception of bassoons, but it rapidly became apparent that the brass situation was going to be a problem. We received no new brass players at all and were left with one trumpet and one french horn player, both of whom still made a valuable contribution to the overall sound nevertheless. We also had no percussionists. This called for drastic action and for the most part all music had to be arranged specially for the group. Thank heavens for Sibelius software! I set to and produced as much new music as possible and as ever the players rapidly matured into attentive and excellent musicians and rose to all challenges.

Our first concert was scheduled for the end of November in Avenue St. Andrews Church. Unfortunately my lower back problem rapidly developed from being an extreme nuisance to a level which rendered normal life impossible. When I finally got to see a specialist I found myself in hospital two days later. As ever at SYS this proved to be no problem for the indispensable Kerry Walsh who simply took over the rest of the term and prepared them for the concert.

The concert in November went very well and I was just about able to conduct a couple of the items and fill in for a missing double bass player as long as my wife carried the bass in for me. Kerry directed the rest of the show with aplomb, showing the audience that any worries about my absence were completely unfounded.

As ever FSYO helped with raffle and refreshments after and a decent sum was raised for general funds. In January we had the now traditional weekend at Avon Tyrrell and thankfully my back repair had worked and I was able to join in fully once more. A lot of new music was studied and many interesting talents emerged from the pupils, both in the talent contest and the problem solving activities run by the in-house staff. We performed to families and friends on Sunday afternoon and the general opinion seemed to be very favourable.

This ground work and the following rehearsals prepared us well for the all-important Pyramid Concert in March. Once again thanks to the excellent attendance record of the pupils and the superb coaching from our tutors our performance in the concert was a great success. It is always so nice for the pupils to see how much they have moved on from earlier times and catch up with their tutors and friends from previous ensembles.

Summer term proved to be rather surprising in that whilst we all knew that a certain amount of reorganisation was inevitable due to the current financial situation in Southampton, the full extent only gradually became apparent. It was clear that the recruitment problems in brass and percussion especially had rendered the continuing survival of SYS as an orchestra untenable. Subsequently I decided to leave my position so as to hand over the new ensemble to an established member of the SMS staff. This was sad for me in many ways as I had grown to really enjoy the challenge of extracting the maximum amount of music from an intermediate ensemble. However the personal events of the year had also shown me that working at such a pace was no longer such a good idea and that if I wanted to carry on as a professional performer it was better not to be working three session days from now on.

Our final concert on July 3<sup>rd</sup> was a memorable one not only for the superb standard of the players but also for the lovely presents and tributes received from the various different sides. I was delighted that my wife was also included as she had been a dedicated helper over the last two years. I was pleased to be able to thank the orchestra's tutors Kerry Walsh and Ruth Shelton-Jones, both of whom had proved absolutely invaluable to our success.

My little composition which parodied the idea of Haydn's Farewell Symphony proved to be rather more poignant than originally intended. I had meant it as a farewell and *bon voyage* before the next academic year began. I'm sure however that whatever happens next year the players will all continue to gain enjoyment from their music making. I hope they will all look back with as much fondness as I do on their time with SYS.

Phil Batton