

TEN YEARS OF GOOD MUSIC NEAR YOU - THE BRIDGEWATER SINFONIA CELEBRATES

A lot of Water has passed under the Bridge since Thursday, May 14, 1998, when The Gazette's banner headline read "Facing their first night", and subsequently, "it could have been the South Bank". The article on the inauguration of a new orchestra in Berkhamsted, the Bridgewater Band, featured a vignette of the 19th century Countess Charlotte, the wife of the seventh holder of the Bridgewater title and noted local patron of the arts. She organised concerts in the family seat at Ashridge. The Duke of Bridgewater is best known for being "the father of inland navigation in England".

A group of local professional musicians – Terry Wooding (horn). Sue Beuttler (clarinet) and Mary Harris (cello) – had asked [Adrian Davis](#) to act as a focal point for "an orchestra from the community, for the community". They wanted to present standard classical repertoire of a high quality as well as to give the audience and players alike a chance to enjoy more unusual and challenging pieces without the need to travel elsewhere to find them.

The Bridgewater Band was created from a passion and enthusiasm for live classical music and a desire to provide the community with something more usually found only in larger towns; it sprang from a happy combination of a large number of first-rate professional and semi-professional musicians who lived locally, and a man who had the talent and the vision to lead them.

Adrian Davis had just left Berkhamsted School where he had been Director of Music for many years. He now had time to bring a new orchestra together, despite his other activities as freelance conductor, keyboard performer, composer and examiner for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. Now, ten years later, he is still the Bridgewater's conductor, and the orchestra has performed ten full concert seasons, coming together four times a year to play in the friendly, intimate atmosphere of [St Peter's Church](#) where its audience can enjoy and participate fully in a shared love of the classics.

The orchestra was lucky that the church happens to be an excellent venue for concerts. The acoustic works well for both chamber and symphonic music. Above all, the audience is closer to the music and the musicians than they would be in a major auditorium. There is a direct communication in both directions that the musicians hugely enjoy. This is the essence of live music. After the concert, the atmosphere is enhanced as the Friends of the orchestra and players get together for a party with drinks and food, as well as the opportunity to discuss the works and the performance.

The orchestra has been helped from the very beginning by a group of music lovers, [Friends of the Bridgewater](#), who contribute by their presence at concerts, their generous

financial support and practical help with all the many tasks essential to keep an orchestra functioning.

The orchestra has acquired its own pool of local players, which includes international artists such as flautist [Edward Beckett](#), trumpet player [Giles Fowler](#) and double bass player [Leon Bosch](#), who return regularly for the sheer enjoyment of playing in such a special ensemble. When distinguished Spanish horn player [Javier Bonet](#) came to play the solo in Britten's Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings, he later joined the horn section of the orchestra for Tchaikovsky's 5th Symphony for the pure pleasure of participating.

Stuart James, from the Philharmonia Orchestra, is the current leader of the Bridgewater. He succeeded Julian Cummings, of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, who led the Bridgewater for several years and made a huge contribution to the orchestra's style and character before his early death in 2006.

In its first decade, audiences have delighted in symphonies, concertos, overtures, choral works; in works by composers from Bach to Shostakovich and from Rossini to Respighi to Rubbra. Each season the orchestra invites a distinguished soloist to play in one of the concerts. These have included violinist [Paul Barritt](#), clarinettist [David Campbell](#) and former BBC Young Musicians [Anna Markland](#) (piano), [David Pyatt](#) (horn), and [Tom Poster](#) (piano). The Bridgewater also takes great delight in acting as a platform for young student musicians to gain orchestral experience. They are drawn from the London music colleges and indeed, not a few live and went to school locally.

Many concert-goers will remember the inaugural concert which took place on Saturday, May 16, 1998 in St Peter's Church with its programme of Saint Saëns' 'Organ' Symphony, Mozart's Magic Flute Overture, Purcell's Chacony in G minor, Copland's Letter from Home and Schubert's 'Unfinished' Symphony. It was a gala occasion, with a tremendous atmosphere of elation, and it was an enormous success – "full of people hoping it would never end" was typical of the press reviews.

After 10 years of exciting concerts, references can be made to the Bridgewater as though it were normal to have a professional symphony orchestra in a town with a population of just 20,000. Of course the audiences come from all around the area and there are even regular supporters who come from London. Families and young people are especially welcome and all those under 18 are entitled to free tickets.

Now the orchestra is celebrating again, not least at the recent announcement that [Sir Andrew Davis](#), one of Britain's leading conductors and known all over the world, has readily agreed to become Honorary Patron – a great honour and privilege for the orchestra. Sir Andrew is familiar to many for his connection with the BBC Proms. What fewer people know is that he is a local boy, and was educated at Watford Grammar School.

This new association comes as the Bridgewater, supported by generous donations from the [Friends](#) of the orchestra and local lovers of classical music, has adopted a fresh new look aiming to reach even more of the community it plays for. Regular Saturday shoppers in

Berkhamsted will have noticed a market stall lavishly sporting the orchestra's new colours and advertising forthcoming concerts – and its new name, the Bridgewater Sinfonia.

On Saturday, June 7, 2008 at 7.30pm – as close to the original date as logistics will allow – the Tenth Anniversary Celebration Concert will take place in St Peter's Church with an exciting programme consisting of Vaughan Williams' Dona Nobis Pacem (marking the 50th anniversary of the composer's death which falls this year) and Mahler's Symphony No 1 – a huge undertaking with a larger orchestra than normal, and promising to be "another rousing concert on our doorstep" (as the local press once commented). With a special souvenir programme, and post concert champagne reception to which the whole audience is invited, the orchestra and audience together will celebrate in style the tenth birthday of a significant community enterprise. The Bridgewater Sinfonia is looking forward to its next decade.

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