Young Artist Focus

Autumn – 2009

Contents:

Time and Me - A Composer in the House reflects

Instruments and Awards for Young Musicians

The Royal Philharmonic Society

Creating a future for music

Indoors with the RLPO

From 2007-09 Kenneth Hesketh returned to Liverpool, the city where he was born, as RPS/PRSF Composer in the House.

Watching the RLPO and Ensemble 10/10 win not one, but two RPS Music Awards this year I could look back and feel relaxed about my stint 'in the house'. Time hasn't always allowed such moments of calm reflection but the last two years have proved to be incredibly rewarding and precious.

While Composer in the House, I took part in programming, educating and (vicariously) the performances of a major symphony orchestra; I've composed, listened, spoken to and learned from the people 'front and centre', as well as those behind the scenes - the heads of departments, people on the reception desk, technical crews and box office workers. All were helpful and amazingly resourceful, even when time was at a premium.

The residency put a mirror to my own strengths and weaknesses, and I am, of course, still digesting the impact of it all. It was not without a moment or two of frustration, but needless to say, the experience has been a far cry from the 'ivory tower' image usually associated with the role of a composer.

The RPS/PRS Foundation scheme was devised to facilitate this situation, and whilst there are other schemes connecting composer with performer with audience, this is certainly one of the most rewarding.



It has amazed me how much gets accomplished, day in day out, in the relatively little time available and the standard at which it is achieved. I'm also cheered by the surprising open-mindedness of a large part of the audiences, not only in their response to my new works over the last two years, but to all work that was new, unfamiliar or just straight demanding. The RLPO and Ensemble 10/10 are masters at eking out every minute of rehearsal time to ensure performances are of a consistently high artistic level, and that each new work is a welcome addition to a programme - not just an unwanted guest (the concern of many a composer!)

I believe the players would also agree with me on the subject of time - they're busier now than ever, thanks to their own success (both live and recorded), the guiding hands of conductors Vasily Petrenko and Clark Rundell (just two of the conductors I have worked with during this time) and the artistic vision of Executive Director Andrew Cornall. I do wish there had been more time to get to know the players better. That they are first-rate musicians I learned in the first week, however.

Lest this report seem merely a list of frantic goings-on, I should say that there HAS been time to chat to and hear feed-back from audience members (who come from far and wide to the Phil these days), as well as youth, amateur and community performers, and visiting international musicians all taking part in the City of Culture celebrations.

Writing a total of twelve new works for the various instrumental and vocal combinations the Phil had to offer made sure I crammed as much in to every minute of the residency as possible. There were also pre-concert talks, programming meetings, panels and lectures at the RNCM and Liverpool University (where I'm now an honorary professor) making this an incredibly rich and varied time. The new University appointment is an exciting extra benefit and will allow, I hope, my connection with my native stomping ground to deepen further.

Time ebbs and flows ("like the sea, like time" to quote Pablo Neruda, and the title of my own chorus and orchestra work for many of the varied forces at the RLPS). My time as Composer in the House made me revisit much of my own past; there have been many 'Madeleine' moments which impacted upon my work much more consciously as a result. Being at the centre of the city's musical life has deepened my compositional and emotional connection to Liverpool and the North-west, and encouraged me to find time to allow a stay 'in port' (if not a ferry across the Mersey).

I wish the next incumbent (and the next orchestra) as much time as possible to accomplish all the goals they set themselves and enjoy the many challenges of Composer in the House.

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Look out for a new Composer in the House later this year!

Young Artist Diary Dates:

Chilcott Scholarship Auditions: 4 October 2009

Chilcott Scholarship Applications: Closing date 30 June 2010

RPS Composition Prize: Closing date 31 March 2010

Sir John Barbirolli Memorial Foundation: Nominations from College Principals by 31 May 2010