

# BERKSHIRE GUITAR SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2008

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### **December meeting**

As everyone should be aware by now the meeting on Sunday December 14th breaks new(ish) ground for the Society's Christmas meeting. We are starting off with a performance of Ivan Andrews' Berkshire Scenes, so those of you that have been involved for the last two meetings, don't forget to give your part some rehearsal time this week and to bring your music along on the 14th! After which we have some member's solos - if you intend playing could you let Gary ([jordangv@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:jordangv@tiscali.co.uk)) and myself know please if you haven't already done so - to be followed by some food and drink.

Friends and partners etc are welcome to this meeting so please ask interested parties along. Please also bring an item of food or drink that can be shared around to help the social side of the evening get along - it need not be christmas fare - we can't eat mince pies all the time!

See you at 7.30 pm on the 14th at SHP!

### **Fiona Harrison - Workshop 22nd November**

I feel sure that I wasn't the only one of the 11 participants at the workshop in the hall of St Nicolas Church in Earley on the 22nd who found that the time absolutely flew by. Similarly, I doubt anyone left without being in possession of at least one nugget of information to help with that perpetual battle, achieving effective practice, which was the theme of the afternoon.

It was particularly useful for those of us like me for whom attendance at guitar workshops is a rare event and who have not been taught for some years. Thus advice along the way on what might to some seem elementary matters such as playing legato was a bonus. And while some of the advice about effective practice may have sounded familiar (eg the importance of SLOW practice) as Fiona pointed out it is very much the case that while we think we know this stuff, we don't do it. There was a great deal in the session that I hope to retain in my grey matter and to actually use, not least Fiona's "law of 3's" ie doing something

3 times can be worthwhile practice, less than that and it won't stick.

Thanks obviously to Fiona for passing on her expertise in a very enjoyable fashion, and also to the participants for their attendance and contributions. We must not forget those of Fiona's students who permitted their practising to be filmed in order to drive home the discussion of how not to practice - thanks are due to them and I hope that they are deriving the benefit of the experience.

### **Fiona Harrison - Recital 22nd November**

Given that the nation was supposedly transfixed in front of their TVs watching John Sergeant's swan song on Strictly Come Dancing, it was wonderful to see an audience in excess of 50 persons gather in the Recital Room to see Fiona Harrison play a programme which was full of promise, covering all periods from Baroque to modern and most of the continents on the planet.

We started with a pair of pieces by Silvius Leopold Weiss (1686 - 1750) in the shape of his prelude from the sonata S-C 34 and the well known Fantasie. These were followed by a pair of short sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti (1685 - 1757), K 83 and K 322. The standard for the evening was set by these initial pieces as Fiona played them all with a high degree of lyrical expressiveness - I particularly liked the tuneful K322.

These were followed by La Triunfal Gran Fantasia de Concierto by Julio Sagreras (1879-1942), a significant work from a composer who was pivotal in taking the guitar from popular South American culture into the concert halls. I had not heard this work before, but will be on the look out for it again having heard Fiona's rendition.

Lou Harrison (1917 - 2003) was an unconventional composer whose music was somewhat spartan in nature, harmony being unimportant with the emphasis on melody and rhythm. He was subject to a number of non European influences such as the gamelan music of Indonesia, and in his personal life an advocate of gay rights. All of this came through in the way Lou Harrison's Music for Bill and me was played by Fiona, the title referring to Harrison's partner. A very different piece, very well played.

We then stayed right up date with A Short Walk in A Rainforest by Richard Charlton (born in the UK in 1955, resident of Australia since 1962). It was not difficult to hear the wildlife and other evocations of the location as Fiona performed the piece with the aplomb which we were by now coming to expect.

The first half of the performance came to an end with Oblivion, a slow tango written for his band by Astor Piazzolla (1921 - 1992) which was very expressively played, followed by two familiar Lauro waltzes, Angostura and Marubino.

As we resumed we stayed in South America for two pieces by Agustin Barrios (1885 - 1942), firstly Alms for the Love of God, which gave Fiona a chance to display an extremely solid and lyrical tremolo which was much admired by the audience, followed by Julia Florida, a piece which many of us have tried and will have appreciated this demonstration of how to use variation of tempo and dynamics in playing the piece.

We thus came to the final piece of the evening, a setting of the Japanese Legend of Hagoromo by Keigo Fujii based on a melody by H Yamanoha and written in 1992. Fiona explained that this was the first public outing for the piece which was based on Japanese modes, required the re-tuning of 3 strings and contained many unusual time signatures. The audience may therefore have felt a degree of trepidation as Fiona started on this work, but any such feelings were rapidly dispersed as we were transfixed by what followed. Our programme notes obligingly explained the Legend but I would not have attempted to relate the story to the rapidly changing nature of the music. This was clearly Japanese in character and required Fiona to exercise a variety of techniques in novel ways.

This piece was a veritable tour de force by Fiona and was appreciated as such by the audience who clearly gave their stamp of approval to the performance. Fiona had said she was looking for audience feedback and she certainly obtained an overwhelmingly positive reaction.

Our entertainment came to an end at this point as Fiona (unusually) did not offer an encore although the audience would have welcomed it. If this was a response to the magnitude of the performance of the Legend then that was understandable. Perhaps it was better that our evening's entertainment ended on such a high note.

A most enjoyable evening, and if you missed it, with Fiona on this sort of form if you get the chance to see her play then I would suggest you take it.