
NEWS FOR CELLISTS SPRING 2016

Errollyn Wallen Cello Concerto

Last July, Matthew Sharp recorded Errollyn Wallen's Cello Concerto using a cello made by Robin Aitchison. The resulting album of Wallen's work, *Photography* was released this March by NMC Recordings who specialise in new music from the British Isles. We were so inspired by the cello concerto that we decided to interview Matthew and Errollyn to find out more about the piece and the process of recording it. Their candid interviews give an absorbing insight into the intense processes of composition, preparing a new piece of music for its première and the challenges involved in recording a new concerto in a single day. Their interviews are on pages 2-3.

NMC have kindly allowed us to publish excerpts of the concerto online and the publishers, Peters Edition, have also given permission for us to publish two pages from the cello part. See 'Wallen Cello Concerto' in the Publications section of www.aitchisoncellos.com

Matthew Sharp studied with Boris Pergamenschikow and now plays a copy of Boris Pergamenschikow's Montagnana cello made by Robin Aitchison in 2013.

Cellos by Robin Aitchison

Robin has just completed a cello for Misha Nemtsov, Pierre Fournier Award winner in 2011 and principal cellist of the Mozarteum Orchestra, Salzburg. Misha commissioned a special copy of the Marquis de Corberon Stradivari cello with a maple back. Current commissions include copies of a c.1755 Guadagnini, the ex-Pergamenschikow Montagnana and another Marquis de Corberon copy. Robin's current waiting list is 12 months and the price of his cellos in 2017 will be £27,500. Please contact us if you are interested in trying any of Robin's cello models as it is usually possible to arrange meetings with owners of his existing instruments.

Feldenkrais Technique

Sarah is currently researching the benefits of the Feldenkrais technique for cellists. If you have any experience of Feldenkrais she would be very grateful if you would email her at info@aitchisoncellos.com

Arioso and Versum strings

In our next issue we will review Larsen Magnacore Arioso G and C strings and also the Versum set from Thomastik Infeld. If you have any experience of these strings or if you would like to visit us in the next few months and test these strings on your cello, we would be delighted to hear from you.

Newsletter subscription update

This autumn we will be in contact to re-confirm your subscription to *News for Cellists* and to ask how you would like to receive newsletters in future, whether by post or via an email link. The newsletter will, as always, remain free!

Thank you in advance for taking the time to let us know your preference. We will create a subscription page on our website this autumn where you can confirm your details, or you would be most welcome to email or write to us with your details and we will make a note of your preference.



Newsletters by post or email?

ERROLYN WALLEN CELLO CONCERTO

Matthew Sharp and Errollyn Wallen talk about the Wallen Cello Concerto.

Matthew Sharp: 'When Errollyn was writing the concerto in 2007 I popped into Trinity Laban Conservatoire where we were both teaching that day. Errollyn had the draft score with her and I had a spare hour in my timetable so I said I'd have a quick look at it and play it to her. I've played a lot of new music over the years and would normally expect to get a quick flavour of a new piece by looking through it for an hour or so but on this occasion, I only managed to get through the first page after an hour's work! As I unpicked the piece for the first time it felt almost like a violin concerto on the cello, as it opens with an incredibly intense and stratospheric cadenza.

'When the finished score arrived through my door in late 2007 I had about six or seven weeks before the first performance (an unusually generous lead time) but I definitely needed every one of those weeks to prepare. There was a lot of work in establishing the 'geography' of the piece, working out some pretty idiosyncratic fingerings in an attempt to reveal the sensual, filigree delights of the music far beyond the normal limits of the cello. It's quite rare for me to bow and finger my own parts extensively but this score has patches which are dense with quite odd and very personal fingerings. It's not an issue of extended technique but the need to be able to maintain extreme intensity and to navigate through some very dense and complex passages. The writing is so original that it asked for something fresh and out-of-the-ordinary in my approach.

'When I'm learning a piece of new music, especially a piece with orchestra, I need to somehow bring the sounds and relationships in the music alive in the room in order to know what they might mean. That takes me time and it's an important phase in the preparation process, particularly because I know that time will be short in rehearsal prior to a première or recording. So a lot of the preparation I do is around embodying the score as I see it and hear it, moving around the room with the score coursing through my veins, trying to get a feel for this unknown thing in a physical way, literally singing the music, so that I'm somehow physically incorporating the orchestral parts. The important thing for me is not to leave the score on the page or on the keyboard but to find some way of bringing it to life, sometimes working all around the house, singing and embodying the rhythms, melodies and harmonies.

'Errollyn and I have had a burning desire to record the concerto ever since its first performance by the Orchestra of the Swan at the Wiltshire Music Centre in 2008. There's no second-guessing the response of an

audience at a première. This first performance had an extraordinary reaction from the audience, not just the predictable: 'what an interesting new work' but a very direct, heart-felt response. Errollyn's concerto seemed to transcend resistance, fear and prejudice. Maybe the innate alchemy - the earthy/ethereal, fiendish/fabulous qualities of the piece - offered something deeply human and extremely delightful? Radio 3 tweeted in January: 'If you liked Tavener's *The Protecting Veil* you should give the Wallen Concerto a go'.

'It's always quite tough raising the money for a recording and finding a label but the NMC opportunity arose quite naturally through contacts and conversations. The orchestra for the recording of the cello concerto and a four-movement piece called *Photography* was made up of a group of exceptional players, most of whom know Errollyn. We had just one day to rehearse and record both the *Concerto* and *Photography* and the music was new to quite a few players, so it was a very demanding schedule for everyone. The orchestral parts have moments of quicksilver counterpoint which are challenging instrumentally and also in terms of ensemble but everyone was on side and the production team were very supportive.

'The recording producer was Andrew Keener who is a legend in the production world and the sound engineer was the fabulous Gerry O'Riordan, whose expertise is versatile and wide-ranging. We recorded in the Henry Wood Hall, with its thrilling acoustic. In terms of microphones there was nothing particularly close to me, so I thought Robin would be pleased to hear that sometimes they had to turn the orchestra mikes up so the orchestra could be heard alongside the cello. The concerto is a one-movement piece, so we 'browsed' and then worked in chunks, doing a bit of rehearsal and then recording quite large passages as we went. Time was of the essence and Andrew had to crack the whip all the time.

'We recorded the massive opening solo cadenza once the orchestra had left, so there I was on my own in the Henry Wood Hall, working to maintain the intensity of this extraordinary piece after a long day of recording. Andrew has absolutely perfect pitch and there was one particularly fiendish passage that took quite a few intense takes to clinch. It was pleasurablely challenging and I joked with the team back stage about my thumbs falling off.

'I aim for my recorded sound to be as impactful as my live persona, trying to squeeze that persona into the single dimension of sound. It's like a repeated Grand National race: the gates open, you hit the ground running and have to be able to repeat, repeat, repeat,

while still getting into the sonic DNA of what that music is. The recording process has a very singular, mesmeric focus and intensity.

'When I first received a copy of the finished, fully mastered recording, I kept slipping my headphones on for another listen - I found it genuinely exciting to hear. It is such a fantastic piece of music and it was fascinating to feel my way through the recording and ask myself if it was as exhilarating as I hoped it could be. I think it does communicate a thrill and a uniqueness. I didn't want listeners to Errollyn's new piece to be bombarded with the sensation that *'this is a very technically demanding piece,'* I wanted it to connect as the fresh, uplifting, compelling music that it is. So it was great to hear Helen Wallace on the Radio 3 *Record Review* last month commenting on the 'freshness' of the concerto, its 'freewheeling exuberance' and 'improvisatory and dance-like' qualities. It's great to know that this extraordinary piece is now out in the world, working its uplifting magic.' MS

Errollyn Wallen: 'The Orchestra of the Swan commissioned me to write a concerto for Matthew Sharp in 2007. I had composed a piece called *Derivish* for him before (which he recorded with Dominic Harlan on my album *The Girl in My Alphabet*) so I knew a lot about Matthew as a performer already. When it was time to compose the *Cello Concerto* I already had a lot of crucial information at my fingertips. Matthew's playing is always informed by a sense of drama, occasion and atmosphere, so I had all this to explore in the concerto. He has so many different shadings and nuances and tones at his disposal and he is absolutely fearless, so much so that you can take virtuosic extremes for granted. The concerto sounds improvisational but it is rhythmically complex and notationally very precise, so for Matthew to learn the concerto and make it come to life in the way he has is a real feat.

'The *Cello Concerto* took some time to write. I had the overwhelming sense of being a sculptor, chiselling out notes from a lump of granite. But the piece sounds incredibly lyrical and flowing, which is very different to the experience I had of composing it. Structurally it's quite an abstract piece, but it sounds very emotional when performed. The forces are for solo cello and a string orchestra. With a string orchestra accompanying, I didn't need to worry unduly about balance, but there is always a challenge to make the cello really stand apart. The piece opens with an unusually long cadenza, which establishes the cello as the commanding presence driving the whole piece. I then tried to explore a range of groupings and relationships between the cellist and the orchestra, sections and individuals. One of my favourite moments is where the solo cello plays with the cello section and then another passage

where a lot of the writing is very high for the cello, ushering in the leader who dovetails with the solo cello, both solo violin and cello competing for the high notes.

'I decided to compose the *Cello Concerto* as a single movement so that I could achieve an intensity and a flow while still exploring all the musical contrasts in conventional concerto movements. There are slower, reflective sections and more intense passages without the interruption of separate movements. Much of the piece is written incredibly high, almost against the cello. I told Matthew that he may be the only person who could play this piece but he disagrees: in 1959 people thought the Shostakovich concerto would be unplayable by anyone else apart from Rostropovich. I believe that many important compositions were successful because they were written with a particular performer in mind. A composer feels very sure-footed when focussing directly on a particular musician's personality and skills. I honestly think this concerto is one of my best works and it's because I was composing it for Matthew to perform.

'The response at the première was quite incredible. People absolutely understood the work, and both Matthew and I realised that we must find a way of getting it out into the world. It's not that easy to get new works recorded these days but when NMC approached me last April and said they'd like to produce a CD of my work, that was clearly the moment for the concerto. I was lucky enough to be able to put together my own orchestra — Orchestra X — an orchestra of people whose playing I really admire, including leader David Le Page who had led the première of both works being recorded that day. Christopher Allan who was a great ally in helping me prepare for the recording had also played in the cello section at the first performances. I was working with a wonderful sound engineer, Gerry O'Riordan, producer Andrew Keener and conductor Nicholas Kok. No work of music is in the sole domain of the composer: you are always part of a team in order for the work to get out into the world. The recording session was a delight, even though it was extremely intense. Matthew's fingers were actually bleeding by the end!

'My dream now is that the work is performed at the Proms with Matthew as soloist. Matthew Sharp is an extraordinary musician who I think should be more widely known. His way of playing the cello is so distinctive, like nobody else I know.' EW

The *Cello Concerto* is available on *PHOTOGRAPHY*, Errollyn Wallen's new album released on NMC (D221). The score is published by Peters Edition Ltd. (Edition Peters No. 71038) © Copyright 2007 Excerpts from the recording and score can be heard/seen in *Wallen Cello Concerto* in the *Publications* area of our website in *Practical cello* articles.

SELECTED CELLOS AND BOWS

FLORENTINE CELLO c.1740-50

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{5}{16}$ " (744mm) String length: 27" (685mm)

Price: £85,000

A magnificent mid-18th century Italian cello in good restored condition with a wonderful tonal palette. An exciting opportunity to acquire a really good-sounding Italian instrument. Letter of attribution from J&A Beare.

HENRY LOCKEY HILL CELLO 1827

L.O.B.: 29 $\frac{3}{16}$ " (742mm) String length: 26 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (674mm)

Price: £70,000

A beautiful example of this famous maker's work in very good condition with a colourful, expressive tone and good projection. The varnish is a translucent golden brown.

THOMAS KENNEDY CELLO 1814

L.O.B: 29" (735mm) String length: 27" (688mm)

Price: £65,000

A handsome cello in good condition with an exceptionally good tone. Inscribed on the inner table and back. Peter Biddulph certificate.

BERNARD SIMON FENDT CELLO c.1830

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (755mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{16}$ " (686mm)

Price: £62,000

This beautiful cello is in excellent condition, with very fine red-brown varnish and a warm, direct and colourful tone. Certificate from J&A Beare.

THOMAS KENNEDY CELLO 1823

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (740mm) String length: 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (680mm)

Price: £50,000

This Kennedy cello has recently been restored in our workshop and has a powerful, rich tone and quick response. The dark varnish has a very deep craqueleur.

GEORGES ADOLPHE CHANOT 1895

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (755mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (698mm)

Price: £35,000

A handsome, powerful and expressive professional's instrument with a rich, spacious bass and melodious treble. The cello is in very fresh condition.

WAMSLEY SCHOOL CELLO c.1750

L.O.B: 28" (712mm) String length: 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (680mm)

Price: £33,000

This small, elegant cello has an expressive, colourful tone and impressive projection considering its size. A professional player's instrument. Hill receipt.

BARAK NORMAN CELLO c.1720

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (750mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (690mm)

Price: £24,000

A beautiful fully restored cello with a distinctive, characterful and powerful tone. Tremendously responsive under the bow and a joy to play.

KENNEDY SCHOOL CELLO c.1820

L.O.B: 29" (737mm) String length: 27" (685mm)

Price: £14,000

An appealing English cello with painted on purfling in good repaired condition with a rich, clear tone.

WILFRED SAUNDERS CELLO 1963

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (750mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (690mm)

Price: £12,500

A good example of this well-known maker's work in excellent condition with a pleasing, balanced tone.

Selected Cello Bows

Eugène Sartory	88.8	S	£tbc
W E Hill & Sons	72.5	S	£tbc
Stéphane Thomachot	83.2	S	£5,000
W E Hill & Sons	76.5	S/T	£5,000
John Clutterbuck	81.9	G/T	£4,750
Charles Ervin	80.0	G	£4,500
W E Hill & Sons	83.2	S	£4,500
Malcolm J Taylor	76.0	G	£4,500
Albert Nürnberger	76.4	S	£3,750
Bernd Etzler	85.0	G	£3,750
Bernd Etzler	80.4	S	£3,750
Yannick Le Canu	80.0	S	£3,500
Tino Lucke	81.8	S	£3,410
Tino Lucke	82.5	S	£3,410
John Aniano	81.4	S	£3,170
Christian Wanka	80.8	S	£3,010
Roger Zabinski	83.3	S	£2,980
Martin Beilke	81.9	S	£2,750
Richard Grünke	82.9	S	£2,750
Klaus Grünke	82.7	S	£2,750
Klaus Grünke	82.3	S	£2,750
Bernd Etzler	81.0	S	£2,750
Emmanuel Begin	79.5	S	£2,730
Robert Pierce	81.8	S	£2,850
Andrew McGill	80.0	S	£2,400
Eric Gagné	81.7	S	£2,440
David Tempest	83.4	S	£2,200
Howard Green	81.5	S	£2,200
Richard Wilson	82.2	S	£2,000
Alfons Riedl	81	S	£1,500
Juliano Oliveira	82.6	S	£960
Luan Ruy	79.7	S	£960
Jackson Fornaciari	81.8	S	£960