
NEWS FOR CELLISTS JANUARY 2011

Cello Benefits

As a teenager, I'd get very tired of wise-cracking passers-by calling, 'Who's your boyfriend, darling?' as I walked down the street hugging my cello case to my side and I sometimes wondered why on earth I'd chosen such a human-sized instrument. But the moment I sat down to play, I knew why: no other instrument speaks with the same voice or has such an exhilarating range of sounds to explore.



We have often wondered what draws so many players and listeners to the cello, particularly the increasing numbers of mature adults who take up the cello for the first time or who return to playing after many years. From a more scientific viewpoint, we have also wanted to understand a little more about what makes being a musician so profoundly stimulating and satisfying. So, for the last two months Sarah has been visiting specialist libraries and consulting cellists from all backgrounds to try to get more of an insight into the many rewards of being a cellist. The results of her research are on pages 2-3.

Ready for a Sabbatical?

If you're looking for the funding to take a professional break and to explore a new creative field, you might like to apply to Katherine McGillivray's Get a Life Fund. The Fund assists musicians in taking a sabbatical or similar break from their normal working lives, to re-inspire themselves and their work. Broadly educational or developmental projects across the range of the creative spectrum, not necessarily musical, are supported. Application deadline: 14th March 2011.

Free concert listing website

We recently met the creator of oclassical.com, a new classical concert listing website. The site aims to support live music by providing a powerful online tool for audiences seeking local classical concerts. The basic service is free and there are advanced options available for a modest fee. Contact: info@oclassical.com for more information.

Newly arrived cellos

An exciting group of cellos have recently arrived for sale through the Cello Exchange. All are contemporary instruments and were commissioned and played by exceptional professional cellists from orchestras such as the LSO, ENO and the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Makers include British luthiers John Dilworth, Michael Kearns, Colin Nicholls and John Watkins and Polish makers Kazimerz Gliszczynski and Jacek Mastalski.

A thought for the New Year

'Music exalts life, enhances life and gives it meaning. It is both personal and beyond the personal. For those who love it, it remains as a fixed point of reference in an unpredictable world. Music is a source of reconciliation, exhilaration and hope which never fails. It is an irreplaceable, undeserved, transcendental thing.'

(Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind*, page188)

CELLO BENEFITS

Music and the Brain There is a long history of research into the effects of music on children and adults, with a host of books and articles arguing for and against almost every conclusion. However, recent advances in MRI brain scanning technology have provided concrete evidence of the effect of music on the brain. Just as physical exercise changes the shape of the body, musical training alters and strengthens the brain, perhaps more radically than any other cognitive activity. Professional musicians are now known to have a greater volume of grey matter in the areas of the brain governing motor control, the interpretation of sound and visuo-spatial processing. Musicians who started training before the age of 7 also have a thicker corpus callosum (the bundle of nerve fibres connecting the two hemispheres of the brain). These changes in the structure of the brain not only improve musical skills, but can also increase ability in other areas such as speech, language, memory, attention and empathy. The brains of trained musicians are also more plastic than those of non-musicians, and therefore playing an instrument may enhance your ability to learn other skills.

The dramatic activity in the brain caused by listening to music and revealed by MRI scans is beautifully described by Philip Ball, author of *The Music Instinct*: 'Whereas many cognitive tasks such as vision or language have fairly well-localised centres of brain activation, music does not. To put it crudely, when we listen to music, all the lights are apt to come on at once. Pretty much the whole brain may become active. No other mental stimulus comparably engages all aspects of our mental apparatus, and compels them to speak to each other; left to right hemisphere, logic to emotion. It's quite simply a gymnasium for the mind.' (p.241)

Music also has a positive effect on the immune system, boosting levels of anti-microbial proteins, while mood-influencing hormone levels are regulated by music, reducing stress levels. Susanna Wilson took part in a research project playing Bach cello suites in the waiting room of the antenatal clinic of a London hospital. Researchers measured the blood pressure of expectant mothers and found that lower blood pressure readings were measured after listening to the cello. Recorded music is also being used in the pre-operative stage of surgery to enhance the effects of anaesthesia.

Researchers are also exploring the positive effects of music for the older generation. A study of healthy older adults showed that learning and performing music is an ideal way to maintain and

extend mental ability in the older brain, as well as providing social and health benefits.

Ask the cellists. Knocking bookshelf dust from my sleeves, I embarked on some fresh research of my own, asking a wide variety of players to express the benefits they derive from being a cellist. Their responses were overwhelmingly positive and often deeply moving. There is room for only a few quotes here, but extended versions can be found at www.aitchisoncellos.com/cellobenefits

Cello therapy. Playing the cello is a therapeutic experience for everyone I spoke to. The profound integration of mind and body which is required to play well is not only absorbing and stimulating at the time of playing, but also positively influences the rest of life. One Jungian analyst says that she feels psychologically and spiritually uplifted after playing her cello. John Blood is a composer and studies the cello with Judith Mitchell: 'The experience she has given me of connecting cello playing with virtually every other aspect of my life has been so rewarding. If you loosen your shoulders and release tension whilst playing the cello then, suddenly, your tone improves. Do the same whilst walking down the road and the world becomes an altogether different place. Break down a seemingly insurmountable musical problem into smaller components, work on those and soon there is no problem at all! The same technique works in everyday life.'

Judith Mitchell believes that the cello is an especially therapeutic instrument: 'The whole craft of playing music on the cello involves balanced and integrated posture, feet well grounded and movements flowing freely.' Pat Legg agrees: 'Just the way we sit and wrap ourselves around the cello is very grounding and the physical involvement with the cello is simply good for the soul. I have talked to various therapists about this, and it seems that people who have music as part of their lives seem to survive much better than those without musical involvement. It's hard to explain, but the action of playing brings the mind and the body together in a very strengthening way.'

One principal cellist of a symphony orchestra always feels at her best when she is playing: 'While I'm playing the cello I feel physically relaxed, but at the same time strong and powerful. I enjoy feeling small joints and muscles that I am normally not aware of. The feeling of transferring the weight of body onto the instrument is fulfilling and pleasurable. I feel the instrument as being part of

me. During playing, the mind and concentration become so sharp and elevated to a different level that it is not easily compared to any other activity.'

Another place. Another important theme in people's experience is the unique sensation music gives of being 'somewhere else'. Carol O'Brien started playing the cello at the age of 65 and is now able to play chamber music with friends: 'When my part isn't too difficult and I can listen to the other players, it's an exhilarating feeling to be part of something so beautiful. It really has added another dimension to life.' As her teacher Pat Legg puts it: 'When you listen to your fellow players, there is a movement from self-absorption to being part of a bigger picture; becoming aware of your own body and your own sounds in relation to those of others.' Judith Mitchell describes this experience as being 'both individual *and* in union with humanity at one and the same time.' Judith's friend Margaret Quail, a psychotherapist and cellist, is excited by Donald Winnicott's concept of a 'third area of human living', a state between separateness and union, which one can experience through a creative activity such as music making. Margaret writes: 'It is this idea of the potential space of the intermediate area of experience which fascinates me. It is neither my inner world nor the outside reality. I am conscious of it when I engage in all sorts of activities: attending a concert or play, reading a book, painting a picture; but never more so than when I am playing the cello or piano – alone and especially with others.'

Love of the cello. Cellists are particularly passionate about the physical qualities of their instruments. Carol O'Brien is deeply in love with her beautiful Forster cello and John Blood finds the 'human-sized' dimensions of his instrument deeply satisfying. Sue Hadley can't help smiling when she holds her cello. Perhaps not surprisingly, cellists are also unanimous in their attraction to the cello's tonal range. Many believe that people are drawn to the cello because its range is so similar to that of the human voice (from bass to soprano, male to female). Steven Isserlis calls the cello 'Everyone's favourite instrument' and believes that the cello's dark, wistful timbre touches the heart more than any other instrument. (Financial Times interview, 22.10.10) Cellists also enjoy the cello's position in the orchestra. John Blood was inspired to become a composer when he started playing in the cello section of a youth symphony orchestra. 'It's as though I'm at the very fulcrum of that magic that makes an unexpected key change in a Dvorak symphony or a Beethoven quartet so spine-tingling.' Sue Hadley thinks: 'It is the physical experience of actually playing, listening and being this gorgeous low, steady beat for other players

that gives me such an overwhelming feeling of satisfaction. There is a wonderful feeling of calm that surrounds me.'

Self expression. Most cellists feel that the cello provides them with the sounds they need for self-expression which words just cannot provide. A student of the Croatian cellist and teacher Dobrila Bercovic-Magdalenic writes: 'I use the cello's sound to express things which I wouldn't be able to say in words. For me, the sound of this instrument is a 'voice' of all that is.' For John Blood, 'The social pleasure of having musical conversations and arguments with friends whilst playing, without the slippery, tiresome ambiguities of words is, for me, sheer bliss!'

Late starters. There do appear to be particularly profound rewards to be gained from starting the cello in later life, especially during retirement. Sue Hadley started learning the cello at the age of 58 after working as a nanny all her life. She had no experience of classical music or instrumental playing before this, but the cello has become one of her major sources of happiness and self confidence in retirement. 'I knew no-one except other nannies when I retired, but through the cello I have not only found a huge network of dear friends, but a whole world of music which is utterly new and fantastic to me. I feel as high as a kite after playing. I'm always meeting people on the bus or tube who say they wish they could play the cello, and I always tell them that ANYONE can do it.'

In a world of rising life-expectancy, music is likely to become a more important source of fulfilment and wellbeing than ever before. Pat Legg has taught late starters for the last 15 years and is convinced that it is never too late to start. Pat also observes that playing the cello has changed at least one aspect of her students' lives for the better. She observes that it takes considerable courage for a highly accomplished retired professional to learn a completely new skill but, as scientific studies and the reports of players indicate, it would be hard to find a more inspiring and rewarding activity for anyone wishing to enrich and stimulate their mind and life.

Warm thanks to Judith Mitchell for her generous reading list and kind support; to Dobrila Bercovic-Magdalenic for encouraging so many of her students to participate; to Gordana Jevic for her beautiful translation from Croatian to English; to Danish brain scientist Kjeld Fredens for his valuable references and to all the many cellists who inspired this article. A full bibliography and transcripts of interviews with cellists can all be found at www.aitchisoncellos.com/cellobenefits

SELECTED CELLOS AND BOWS

J & J SIMPSON CELLO c.1780

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (745mm) String length: 26 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (672mm)

Price: £35,000

An exquisite English cello in very good condition with an even, deep tone and good projection. The varnish is a beautiful orange brown over a golden ground. Certificate from J P Guiver & Co.

JOHN DILWORTH CELLO 2004

L.O.B: 29" (740mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (692mm)

Price: £19,000

John Dilworth is one of the UK's most respected makers. This cello is modelled on Montagnana's *Sleeping Beauty* and is in excellent condition. It has been the first instrument of a professional London player since it was made in 2004.

COLIN NICHOLLS CELLO 1993

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (750mm) String length: 26 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (683mm)

Price: £16,000

Modelled on a Fendt cello, this cello was played by a professional orchestral cellist and has a warm, rich tone. The condition is immaculate and the antiqued varnish is red brown over a golden ground.

MICHAEL KEARNS CELLO 1998

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (750mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (698mm)

Price: £16,000

A responsive, attractive cello by a well-respected maker in very good condition. The tone is open and powerful and the varnish is orange-brown over a golden ground.

PRAGUE SCHOOL CELLO c.1900

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (750mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (692mm)

Price: £14,000

A beautiful sounding cello in very good condition. The varnish is an attractive orange-brown.

JACEK MASTALSKI CELLO 2005

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (747mm) String length: 27 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (695mm)

Price: £11,500

An impressive and attractive instrument belonging to the principal cellist of a London orchestra. The tone is rich and powerful with a fine treble response.

KAZIMERZ GLISZCZYNSKI CELLO

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (758mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (692mm)

Price: £10,000

This cello has been played professionally since 1969 and has an exceptionally fine tone. The condition is excellent and the varnish is a dark orange brown over a golden ground.

MICHAEL WATSON BAROQUE CELLO

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (743mm) String length: 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (679mm)

Price: £9,000

A pleasing baroque cello made in 1990 with a quick response and full tone. The condition of the cello is immaculate and the varnish is a deep orange brown.

JOHN WATKINS CELLO 1997

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (760mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (690mm)

Price: £8,500

This cello belongs to the principal cellist of a London orchestra and has had extensive professional use.

The tone is rich, powerful and even.

Selected Cello Bows

Victor Fétique	81.4g	£12,000
F N Voirin	77.0g	£8,500
Paul Sadka (gold)	78.5g	£4,400
Victor Fétique	80.8g	£4,000
Morgan Andersen	80.6g	£3,500
Christian Wanka (gold)	81.3g	£3,100
Stephen Salchow	82.4g	£3,075
Brian Alvey (gold)	79.2g	£2,700
Christian Wanka (gold)	80.7g	£2,700
Klaus Grünke	81.0g	£2,670
Robert Pierce	82.9g	£2,630
Paul Sadka	82.6g	£2,500
Bernd Etzler	81.8g	£2,550
Bernd Etzler	80.6g	£2,550
Klaus Grünke	79.8g	£2,040
F C Neuveville	80.8g	£2,000
Ary Dargent	79.5g	£1,600
J S Rameau	76.7g	£1,500
Rudolf Neudörfer	81.1g	£1,500
Coltman (baroque)	75.7g	£1,500
$\frac{3}{4}$ Hill bow	67.4g	£1,500
J S Rameau	76.7g	£1,500
German c.1920	78.0g	£900
J S Finkel (Classical)	64.3g	£900
Lothar Seifert	77.6g	£600