
NEWS FOR CELLISTS AUTUMN 2020

Cellist Heads of Strings

In March I had the pleasure of speaking to five distinguished cellists who are also Heads of Strings: Jo Cole (Royal Academy of Music) Nicholas Jones (Chetham's School of Music) Louise Hopkins (Guildhall School of Music and Drama) Chris Hoyle (Royal Northern College of Music) and David Watkin (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland). The first interviews took place when Covid was taking over northern Italy; the last interview was recorded just as the first UK conservatoire was forced to close. Although so much musical life is still on hold this autumn, it's heartening that conservatoires and music schools have been able to welcome back their students and we publish this article now in celebration of music education all over the UK.

Hand gel and cellos: some advice

Violin makers try to allow up to 20 minutes before handling a varnished instrument if they have had alcohol on their hands as even when the skin feels dry, alcohol is still active and volatile in the skin. To be effective, hand gel has to contain at least 60% alcohol which is a powerful solvent that can easily damage cello varnish. The safest way to clean your hands before playing is to use soap and water but if you have to use hand gel before playing, you should avoid touching the varnish of your cello as the alcohol still in your skin may soften the varnish and leave fingerprints. Make sure to apply hand gel well away from your cello in case of spillage.

iPad/cello alert

Now that iPads are being used by some players instead of sheet music, we are starting to see cellos damaged by falling iPads. Due to an iPad's weight and density, it can pose a serious risk to a cello.

In one case, an iPad was left on a stand beside a cello lying on the carpet. Unfortunately, the joint supporting the head of the stand gradually drooped under the weight of the iPad and when the owner returned from a break, they found the iPad had broken right through the cello ribs. Using a heavier more stable stand might make such accidents less likely to happen.

Solidarity service

We've decided to continue our free solidarity service for professional cellists until April 2021. So if your cello needs some sound post adjustment or you think there's a seam open somewhere, please phone or email us and we'll make an appointment for you to visit. We focus on this work once a month, so do contact us in advance so that we can book you into the next available slot.



We are happy to glue professionals' cellos for free

Social media pages

Thank you for your enthusiastic engagement with our Facebook, Instagram and Twitter posts. If you have any suggestions for things you'd enjoy seeing or hearing about in future, please let us know. We are planning some exciting new posts that we hope you will find useful. Links can be found for each site on our website under Contact us.

HOW TO BE A HEAD OF STRINGS

What does a Head of Strings do? 'It's a big job which faces in many directions,' says Chris Hoyle: 'At the start of each term, I remind myself of my priorities. Whilst there's a significant business and planning side to the role, I determine to prioritise my passion for teaching and music education by guiding and motivating our students and supporting our amazing staff.' Jo Cole describes her job as two only-just-intersecting circles: 'I have to ensure the students are on track for a successful degree while also ensuring they are fully prepared for a realistic, satisfying career as performers. Candidly, for me the second is the priority, but the first has to be properly observed and supported.'

Recruiting and auditioning potential students involves a lot of time each year. Louise Hopkins enjoys this process. 'I'd be happy to chat to applicants all day, discovering not just their talent but their tenacity and potential for self-knowledge. Will they be able to observe and learn where they fit in the music world? Do they have blind faith in what they're doing, to carry them through their studies?' David Watkin observes that some applicants already have a fantastic technical training, while others are natural musicians needing to improve their technique. 'Our job is to help some take off their blinkers and broaden their musical experience, while helping others to evolve technically but never at the expense of losing their free spirits.'

Once students have accepted their places, consultation lessons are arranged with instrumental staff to try to find the best match between students and teachers. David Watkin sees his extensive teaching faculty as a resource for students. 'I pair students with teachers initially. It's an important – and very difficult – thing to get right but the key is for everyone to understand that it's not a relationship set in stone. As students get older, we encourage them to have varied teachers and as long as everyone respects each other's teaching, the students can only benefit.' Heads of strings are also responsible for recruiting new teaching staff and supporting the existing staff body. 'It's a rolling process of inviting great musicians and teachers to join us,' Jo Cole explains, 'ensuring that the needle on the inspiration-and-excellence monitor remains steady and high!'

Planning the chamber music programme for each year group is a complex but potentially very rewarding task for department heads. When Nicholas Jones became Head of Strings at Chetham's 23 years ago, he soon started to evolve the chamber music programme from a very minimal state to an extensive and much-loved part of the curriculum. 'Legendary chamber music teacher Chris Rowland showed me that chamber music can be the least didactic forum in which to study music

– our role as chamber music coaches is to guide young musicians as they discover what it means to become an artist through playing chamber music and making the musical decisions themselves, rather than being directed by a conductor or professional accompanist.'

Another stimulating task for department heads is to arrange each year's programme of masterclasses and concerts with international soloists. Masterclasses are renowned for taking students outside their comfort zone, but David Watkin is happy for his students to be challenged by different ideas. 'If we do get a masterclass teacher whose philosophy isn't quite in line with what we're doing here, it's still OK because it can help students to develop a more complex understanding about how music and the world works. I like to give them the opportunity to filter this for themselves.'

At the heart of any week for a Head of Strings is their own core teaching practice. Jo Cole loves her teaching. 'This gives me a great insight into the student experience and how it is working. I couldn't do the job if I didn't actually have to follow the curriculum and see what students need to manage.' Considerable time and energy are also devoted to running and attending performance classes which are an ideal opportunity to monitor students' progress. 'Students often progress in surges,' Nicholas Jones reflects. 'Breakthrough moments are normally followed by a period of broadening and deepening. Sometimes we witness a breakthrough during a performance class and it's a genuinely exciting moment for everyone present. As we celebrate the student's achievement together, I always remind the other class members that last week or two months ago it was them, making a great leap.'

No modern conservatoire or music school can afford to stand still in this fast-changing world, and heads of department and their teams work closely together to evolve and improve their offering to students. Working at a specialist music school requires even more collaboration between departments, Nicholas Jones observes. 'Students have potentially conflicting academic and musical pressures, but if everyone understands each other and what we're trying to achieve, we can celebrate the amazing students we are educating. The more we talk to each other, the better the outcomes for students.' Louise Hopkins meets regularly with other Guildhall heads of department to exchange ideas. 'I really love those meetings; they're fun and stimulating – a proper debating chamber.' Jo Cole and her colleagues constantly monitor the relevance of what is being taught. 'We want to ensure that we are aligning with what the students need as tools for their futures. We have to maintain the

practicality of proposals and ideas whilst ensuring innovation gets the necessary oxygen.'

Some of the most innovative projects are the product of collaboration between different departments and teachers. David Watkin describes the wonderful café that occupies the whole of the first floor of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. 'It's where so many meetings happen, unplanned and planned; I might chat to the head of ballet and arrange a special workshop for string players, or talk to one of the acting teachers and set up a masterclass on approaching an Ysaÿe sonata as if it's an extract from Shakespeare.'

Chris Hoyle is also keen to find connections with other disciplines. 'I've just attended a percussion day and I'm now wondering whether I can collaborate with a drummer in order to help string students with their off-string bow strokes. In recent months, we've also been working with our "cousins" in elite sport. They know so much about key areas relevant to aspiring young musicians: discipline, goal setting, visualisation, sacrifice and working to achieve one's dreams. For example, I don't believe that a sports person would ever warm up by running fast at the beginning a training session, so I counsel students against warming up by starting with fast scales. In fact, we now begin many RNCM ensemble sessions with a stretching and posture session, just as an athlete would.'

Perhaps the biggest challenge for a Head of Strings is to produce students ready for the realities of the working world. David Watkin aims not simply to fill orchestral vacancies with his graduates: 'We need musicians to be 'buses not trains', to find their own way and not follow predetermined musical tracks. I'm trying to help young musicians to prepare themselves for careers I can't imagine. We just don't know – particularly now – what the music industry is going to look like in a few years' time.'

Musical outreach has become an important part of any training programme. Nicholas Jones is very involved in organising outreach activities for his students. 'Recently we took our whole symphony orchestra to give a concert at an academy in Bolton which is trying to ensure that every child plays a musical instrument. Our students gain so much from such experiences as it increases their confidence and their understanding of what music can achieve and communicate to others.'

Heads of Strings take their pastoral role very seriously. Without being overprotective, Louise Hopkins hopes her students feel they are in an environment where they are known. 'We try to make the department feel small and have a personalised atmosphere, so even if I don't see a student every week, they know that if there's an emergency, they can walk into my room – even if I'm teaching. College gives students walls and time to

grow with some degree of protection. I want our strings students to be fearless, to know themselves, and be sage and pragmatic when things come their way that destabilise them. If they are not equipped to deal with that, we're doing them a disservice. If they leave the building as an independent learner with a sense of their own level, they are strong.' Nicholas Jones stays in constant touch with each string player. 'The corridor at school is a really important place for pastoral contact – it's where you see most of them on a daily basis and can touch base quickly to see how things are going for them. They're working towards a profession which by definition has a certain amount of stress in it, but we are constantly trying to find ways to help them develop the resilience to cope with that.'

'The goal is to set our students free,' says Watkin. 'The temptation for a teacher is to want to be needed by their student but actually your teaching should ultimately make you obsolete. The goal is to become unnecessary.' Louise Hopkins believes that every student can succeed if they know themselves well enough. 'I really believe there is still a place for everybody in the world of work as long as you have defined your individuality.' Jo Cole spends a lot of time writing references in support of students' applications for funding and for jobs, ensuring that they provide her with an up to date CV that helps her to keep up with what they are doing. For musicians to be supportive of each other is essential, she believes. 'The nature of the profession means they are going to be lifelong colleagues – not just fellow students. I actively discourage any signs of aggressively competitive behaviour as it doesn't translate at all well into the professional environment.'

A very significant development in conservatoire training has been to help students prepare for screened auditions, to reflect the adoption of this method by ensembles worldwide. Chris Hoyle has modified the RNCM strings syllabus accordingly. 'Our Year 3 Techniques assessment is a 'real' orchestral audition with the same repertoire requirements as a typical professional audition in the UK and Europe. In addition to that, our students do seven auditions behind screens during their undergraduate training. When they leave here and their career depends upon such an experience, they should feel well prepared.'

Just a few thousand words cannot come close to even summarizing the intense dedication Heads of Strings bring to their huge and varied roles. Jo Cole sums up the indefatigable spirit of her peers: 'Overall it is a dream job with immense rewards – but sometimes I wish I had learnt how to clone myself...'

Huge thanks to Jo Cole, Nicholas Jones, Louise Hopkins, Chris Hoyle and David Watkin for their enthusiastic help and inspiration in creating this article.

SELECTED CELLOS & BOWS

CARLO ANTONIO TESTORE c.1730

L.O.B: 29½" (755mm) String length: 27¼" (691mm)

£320,000

A superb example of Testore's work in excellent condition. This versatile cello sounds particularly magnificent in the context of a string quartet, in which its solo voice projects beautifully while its velvety bass offers exceptional support to the whole ensemble.

Beare certificate.

FENDT CELLO c.1800

L.O.B: 29¼ (743mm) String length: 27" (682mm)

£95,000

This outstanding cello was made by Bernhard Simon Fendt between 1798 and 1809 when he worked for Thomas Dodd in Covent Garden. The cello has a rich, generous tone and an even, quick response. The condition is excellent.

FLORENTINE CELLO c.1750

L.O.B: 30" (760mm) String length: 27¼" (693mm)

£75,000

A handsome Italian cello labelled Lorenzo Carcassi with a colourful, deep, expressive tone and powerful upper register. Previously played by an orchestral principal and soloist. In good restored condition.

J&A Beare letter.

WILLIAM EBSWORTH HILL CELLO 1876

L.O.B: 29" (735mm) String length 27½" (694mm)

£40,000

A rare example of the work of William Ebsworth Hill with a smooth, expressive tone, in very good condition after a full restoration in our workshop. The varnish is a beautiful golden brown.

AITCHISON MONTAGNANA COPY

L.O.B: 29⅞" (740mm) String length: 27¼" (690mm)

£34,000

A close copy of the ex-Pergamenschikow Montagnana cello made in 2017. This cello has a rich, complex tone, a quick response and powerful projection. The cello is in immaculate condition with a patinated golden-brown oil varnish.

PRESTON SCHOOL CELLO c.1800

L.O.B: 29" (740mm) String length: 26½" (679mm)

£25,000

An attractive English cello with painted on purfling in very good condition with a clear, crisp, even tone.

KENNEDY SCHOOL CELLO c.1830

L.O.B: 29" (738mm) String length: 27¼" (693mm)

£20,000

A handsome Kennedy School cello with a beautiful resonant tone and attractive red-brown varnish.

GERONIMO BARNABETTI CELLO c.1880

L.O.B: 30¼" (770mm) String length: 27" (683mm)

£10,000

The second instrument of a renowned orchestral leader, this Barnabetti cello is in excellent condition.

Selected Cello Bows

Joseph Alfred Lamy	79.7	S	£35,000
John Dodd	85.0	S	£20,000
Victor Fétique	76.0	S	£17,500
F N Voirin	76.2	S	£15,000
Samuel Allen	82.0	S	£14,000
John Dodd	86.6	S	£13,500
Samuel Allen	78.8	S	£8,000
David Samuels	80.2	S	£7,510
W E Hill & Sons (Yeoman)	78.9	S/T	£7,500
C H K Schmidt	82.4	G	£7,000
Samuel Allen	83.5	S	£6,750
A R Bultitude	80.8	G/T	£6,000
French bow	77.9	S	£6,000
Paul Sadka	80.0	S	£5,600
Roger Zabinski	82.5	S	£5,250
David Forbes (Dodd copy)	80.0	S	£5,220
Hill (Albert Leeson)	75.5	S	£5,000
Christian Wanka	81.0	G	£4,720
Evan Orman (Dodd copy)	80.6	S	£4,350
John Aniano	83.7	S	£4,350
Bernd Etzler	81.3	S	£3,800
Robert Pierce	79.0	S	£3,700
Richard Grünke	80.8	S	£3,300
Andrew McGill	83.2	S	£3,250
Bernd Etzler	81.2	S	£3,000
H R Pfretzschner	83.0	S	£2,750
Heinz Dolling	77.8	S	£2,500
Siqueira	82.0	S	£1,250
M Francisco	82.0	S	£1,250
Siqueira	82.0	S	£1,250
Luan Ruy	81.1	N	£950

We are seeking cellos and bows for the Cello Exchange. Please contact us for more details.

For a complete list of cellos and bows for sale: www.aitchisoncellos.com