

THE COBWEB ORCHESTRA

July 2020



Silver Trumpet!

The Cobweb Orchestra 25th Anniversary Newsletter

From: nikki.k.lipinski@gmail.com on behalf of Andy Jackson, Jean Ord, Jane Halnan, Tracy Reed, Howard Rocke, Lesley Wearmouth.

Welcome to this 'holiday' edition of our newsletter!

This means I get a bit of a break as it mainly features two founder member interviews – so they have done most of the work (though thanks for your questions, too).

However, I've very quickly put together another word cloud, based on the survey results for what being a member of Cobweb Orchestra has helped us to "do, or do better" (this need not be limited to musical skills). Again please let me have any feedback so it can be improved.



(To see a larger version of this image, click [here](#).)

Just a few more things before I hand over to Tracy Reed and Jean Ord:

First of all an apology and correction regarding last month's description of Jean's involvement with the Spennymoor group. What should have been conveyed is: "that I joined the Spennymoor group when it started, in support of Greg Pullen, their conductor, who is a long standing friend of mine. We used to play for shows together in days gone by, he on cello and me on violin."

Next, to point out that you can also enjoy Tracy's "Observations of a Clarinettist" as your email includes the Winter 2012 newsletter from our archives.

Most of you will know that the remaining founder members are Howard Rocke and Lesley Wearmouth. If you have any questions for either of them, please send them through to me by Friday 14th August.

Last, but not least, we're conscious that it's not only the founder members who have interesting answers and tales to tell. You will notice today that there are a couple of 'standard' questions emerging:

- 1) When you went along to 'blow the cobwebs' off your music stand, what were you expecting? Has it lived up to your expectations?
- 2) Which are your favourite 'highlights' from your years with Cobweb Orchestra (and any 'low' lights)?

So if you'd like to participate, send your answers to these questions (or any others you can think of – plus photos), to me at nikki.k.lipinski@gmail.com and I'll try to include them in a future newsletter.

Founder Member Feature #2

Tracy Reed



How did you get into music? Is anyone else in your family musical, and have you passed it on to future generations?

It wasn't on purpose! At the age of 7, school recorder club wasn't what I was expecting (I thought we would be listening to records), but soon I didn't stop playing it, even when it went dark in a power cut. I didn't pass the 'music test' so I couldn't get an orchestral instrument, but my uncle, who was a self-taught church organist, had a clarinet and later gave me piano lessons, and my grandad used to play the clarinet although I never heard him.

I did a music degree but the aim was to be a primary school teacher so I've done so much more with Cobwebs (like when people say you learn to drive after you've passed your test). There's a photo with my son on the Cobweb website but he's grown up now and is only interested in trains, so I'm trying to pass the music on to my dad in the Ludworth group instead.

We know you play different clarinets. Do you have a favourite and if you do what is it about it you like?

I just love the sound of my pair of 'Divine' clarinets; B flat is a bit easier as the A has a longer stretch, but the A is mellower. The bass is a fabulous instrument to play, especially the lowest notes that make the floor vibrate and people say "ooh!"

If the clarinet part doesn't look as interesting as the bassoon part I'll play that instead. The smaller and higher E flat clarinet gets some exciting things to do, but the tuning is more challenging. Stephen Reay said he would burn it! I think the best thing is to have them all out at the same time and have lots of fun swapping between them.

Which style of music do you enjoy playing the most?

I love Brahms and Dvorak. Playing first clarinet in the middle of a symphony orchestra is my favourite place to be, and my favourite orchestral solo is the very long one in the third movement of Rachmaninov's second symphony. Chamber music is good for different combinations of instruments, while clarinet ensembles have a wide range of music, and I like playing the jazzy stuff like Gershwin. It feels good to 'let rip' sometimes and our Cabaret arrangement of Billie Holiday's 'Lady sings the blues' is great for that! I actually listen to heavy rock music a lot.

When and why did you first play timpani? How does it compare with playing the clarinet?

The Cobweb timps have been passengers in my car several times and have stayed over in my house, but they're tricky to tune and I need more practice rolling. There are other Cobwebbers who have 'volunteered', especially those with a flute or clarinet as there's always plenty of us, but I ended up playing them more after I broke my wrist a few years ago. It's different at the back of the orchestra by yourself, but there can be really dramatic moments. I also enjoyed playing triangle in 'William Tell' during an outdoor prom with fireworks, but tubular bells in a dark cathedral was a bit scary.

Why did you decide to become the leader of the Ludworth group and just how hard is it to try and get everyone playing well together? (Be honest!) What do you think are the particular challenges of supporting a 'beginner' group?



Cobwebs began as a small community group just like Ludworth, so after Andy started it off, I felt determined it should keep going.

The challenge is always trying to find suitable music for different abilities, and to get the balance right between just playing and working on something, to keep everyone happy in rehearsals. When I was a beginner, I remember just being told about 'wrong' notes, so I don't want people to worry about those, but try to follow the stick and listen to each other (although it is funny sometimes and it's not just me who laughs!)

Our summer concert was truly amazing. "Come to Ludworth!"

When you went along to 'blow the cobwebs' off your music stand 25 years ago, what were you expecting? Has it lived up to your expectations?

The flyer caught my attention as I hadn't played in an orchestra for a while and the mention of the Northern Sinfonia made me think it might be good. There wasn't many of us and no social media then, so we could sit and chat about what we wanted to do.

I didn't expect it to become such a big part of my life. If I listen to the radio now, I'm always thinking "we've played that". I didn't expect to perform a solo, have the confidence to attempt conducting, visit so many places and meet so many people who would become such good friends.

Which are your favourite 'highlights' from 25 years with Cobweb Orchestra (and any 'low lights')?

So many memories, not only about the music!

Solos like Rossini's "Variations for small clarinetist", performing one of the Weber concertos that I had grown up listening to and the Mozart concerto with the music stand gradually sliding down by itself. Duets including a double concerto by Krommer with the orchestra getting faster and faster and Lesley and I probably getting redder trying to fit all the notes in. Andy's arrangement of Handel's Water Music with a wind quintet on a boat. Playing for the Queen on a windy day with wild hair and sitting on bin bags. The flashmob 'Undercover Orchestra' in the bus station chasing my music. Mozart's Requiem in Durham Cathedral then being the only Cobwebber left in the bar with the German choir. All the residential - non-stop playing, even with a sore lip, aching jaw and when my hand felt like it was going to drop off, '5 minutes on the podium' which made me realise I might be able to do it, staying up far too late with 'the usual suspects' talking, singing, drinking, eating cheese, then being last for breakfast the next morning. Holidays - being told off for playing music in the train station in Germany, worrying for my own safety playing water netball in Tuscany, being left with a group of Spanish players and the police coming to break up the party. Weddings - including my own, walking into the church to see all the waistcoats, talking about the music when I was supposed to be signing the register. Unfortunately there have also been funerals, but revisiting music reminds me of the Cobwebbers who are no longer with us. Breaking my wrist slipping on a plastic music folder stopped me playing clarinet for a while but it led to other things. As well as experiencing more percussion and making a new website for Cobwebs, I went to keep fit classes, which are not totally different to being in an orchestra, concentrating very hard to work out what to do while trying to watch a leader at the same time.

Founder Member Feature #3

Jean Ord



When you went along to 'blow the cobwebs' off your music stand 25 years ago, what were you expecting? Has it lived up to your expectations?

I was expecting something new and more challenging than the small aged orchestra I was currently playing with where we played the same things ad infinitum and didn't do concerts anymore, which I enjoy. It absolutely lived up to expectations and then some! Everyone was friendly and accepting of all ages and abilities and the music we played was very different. I was impressed by the standard of the professionals who were leading the project.

How does the Cobweb Orchestra compare with the other groups you've played with? Is it different, if so, in what way??

I had only ever played with one other group and Cobwebs was totally different in set up, variety and new and interesting experiences such as workshops and concerts in Marks and Spencer, who were our original sponsors as well as the Northern Sinfonia. In the beginning I found it quite scary, challenging and exhilarating all at once!

What's it like being a Trustee? What are the pros and cons of being involved at this level?

In the beginning I volunteered as a trustee because I didn't want to see the end of Cobwebs and I felt that my knowledge of finance and company law could be put to good use. Those of us who volunteered all had our own specialities and what we didn't know, we worked together to find out.

The trustee's role is rewarding as you see your thoughts and plans come to fruition through the organisation. A meeting once a quarter is not onerous, it doesn't take up too much of your time, although if you are required to assist with project work it could be longer but always interesting and usually on a volunteer basis. The organisation cannot run without this team of trustees and as such you are a valued contributor.

Why had you always wanted to play the bassoon? How does it differ from playing the violin? Which do you prefer and why?

I started to play the violin at the age of 9 mainly because my sister wanted to and I had to do everything she did! I joined a small local orchestra at age 12 and learned to play with others and began to enjoy the experience. My violin was given to me by my uncle who didn't play anymore and it has always been a treasured possession. However in school I learned to play the recorder, my first experience of a wind instrument and subsequently learned to love the sound of the bassoon in the orchestra. Eventually, once I had retired I bought a second hand bassoon and started having lessons which I really enjoy. Having to use your lungs and embouchure to play your instrument is totally different to using a bow on a string and is a whole new learning curve. Whilst I am more proficient on the violin, I enjoy practising solo Bassoon better and sitting in a different place in the orchestra brings a whole new experience. I currently play Violin at Dipton and Bassoon at Spennymoor.



For those of us who haven't experienced playing in the smaller chamber/cabaret groups, how do they differ from playing in the larger orchestral groups?

In the Cabaret group, there is generally one player per part so you need a degree of self-confidence and proficiency on your instrument. It can be scary, especially if you have solos.

The Chamber Orchestra again has a small number of players and you cannot 'hide at the back' (which I like to do sometimes!). They also do quite a number of concerts in small venues and you need to be able to handle rehearsal time followed by a concert, which is invariably tiring so you need a lot of stamina! However the rewards are great as you are left with a great sense of pride after a successful performance.



Which are your favourite 'highlights' from 25 years with Cobweb Orchestra?

The Conductors workshop - 8 weeks of a conductors' course with Andy Jackson and Alistair Dawes, culminating in conducting one movement of the Brahms Variations in Hall 2 of the Sage along with 12 other participants. Fabulous experience.

25 years of friendship with Andy Jackson, Howard Roche, Tracy Reed and Lesley Wearmouth - all founder members.

And my first performance with the orchestra in The Stanley Civic Hall of Sibelius' second symphony in front of my home crowd (I am a Stanley Lass!) This was an awesome evening and one I'll never forget.

There are many more but these stand out.

Has anything you've done with Cobwebs made you cry? If yes, what type of tears - joy, sadness or frustration?!

Yes - on one occasion I was attending a workshop at the Sage Gateshead when a group of us was asked to describe what Cobwebs meant to us. I couldn't get my words out as I was so emotional and I think everyone got the picture - It has helped me through some difficult times and has given me an absorbing hobby together with some lovely friends. Music means a lot, and to me Music is Cobwebs.

.....I'm sure we couldn't agree more??

Thanks so much to Tracy and Jean for sharing their experiences - don't forget to send your own contributions through, plus any questions for Howard and Lesley.

As ever, please send all replies and queries to nikki.k.lipinski@gmail.com