



# ctogenarian

Hello! Hello! Hello!

Hello and welcome to the 19<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Octogenarian*, your friendly reviewer and lobbyist for Bristol's music scene.

In honour of this special Jubilee issue, we would like to introduce the official *Octogenarian* cocktail, recommended for all your Queenly revelry.

First up is Phil Harmonick's review of the Schola concert. Phil's review is slightly fruity, yet with an unpretentious nose. Add one measure of mid-range red wine.

Next is Desdemona Jones' take on Mediæval Trio's Scandinavian programme at St. George's. Desdemona writes with youthful flair and vitality, so add a can of your favourite energy drink, and a generous splash of vodka.

Jammy McCoy's *Philistine's Corner* has this week been combined with the bit where Jay Sunaway goes on and on about something. The unlikely pair attended the Contemporary Voices concert together, the result being a split review of disastrous psychoanalytical insight. For Jammy, add one of those tiny bottles of French lager you get in supermarkets. Jay prefers a nice amaretto. Because he would, wouldn't he.

The ridiculously named Gwendolyn Winthrop is angry again. Add a measure of the bitterest of bitter lemon, and a dash of the driest of dry gins.

Finally, for Jay's crossword, add a measure of homebrewed ale. It takes ages to make, and no one really likes it. Last week's prize was snatched by Phil Farr-Cox, who suggests a nice wedge of lemon to finish it off.

For a non-alcoholic alternative, remove every copy of the *Octogenarian* from the music stand and beat yourself about the head and stomach with it. Happy Jubilee.

## Coming up... The Summer Music Festival

When?	Where?	What?	How much?
<b>Sunday 10 June 2012, 20:00 - 22:00</b>	Racks	Jazz night	Free
<b>Monday 11 June 2012, 18:00-??</b>	Recital Room	<i>Dido and Aeneas</i>	Free
<b>Monday 11 June 2012, 20:00-??</b>	Theatre Bar	Improvisation Night	Free
<b>Tuesday 12 June 2012, 13:15 - 14:00</b>	St Paul's Church	Chamber Music	Free
<b>Tuesday 12 June 2012, 19:30 - 21:30</b>	Auditorium	Composers' Concert	Free
<b>Wednesday 13 June 2012, 19:30 - 21:30</b>	Auditorium	Cimarosa, Holzbauer, Handel	Free

If your delicate sensibilities have been offended by this pell-mell assault of hyperbole, inaccuracy and outright falsehood, tell us all about it at [octogenarianbristol@gmail.com](mailto:octogenarianbristol@gmail.com).

**Contemporary Voices**  
**G12, Victoria Rooms**  
**Wednesday May 16**  
**19:30-20:30**



I'd like to make it clear that I was at no point happy with the arrangement for this

week's concert. The Ed made no bones about the fact that I would not enjoy it, and made sure I took another member of the editorial team as a kind of 'mental anchor' (his words) to stop my Neanderthal little mind being liquefied by avant-garde frippery. This would have been fine had it been either the lovely Desdemona or Gwendolyn, neither of whom look down on me for my musical naivety (they occasionally pass custard creams into my philistine's basket while they work) or perhaps at a push Phil, who I feel may be a softie beneath his stiff-upper-lipped, conservative exterior.

But not that Sunaway. Why did it have to be him?

And so I sat in G12 in the Vic Rooms, the enthusiastically offered tea and bourbon doing very little to stem my disgruntlement at having to spend any sort of time in Sunaway's vicinity. He had opted for some bizarre tincture of chai and a Viennese swirly biscuit, which he would take the tiniest nibble from every few minutes in a fashion that made me want to STRANGLE HIM. We barely exchanged words as I puzzled at the living room-esque layout of the performance area, and he sketched out yet another flawed crossword.

If I was bemused by the faux-homely aesthetic, there was further confusion to come. The concert began with what was named John Cage's *Aria* in the program, but what I will tentatively refer to as an irregular shrieking voice punctuated with awkward silence. I'm sure the performers' reading of the ambiguous graphic score was very well done, but my tiny monkey brain was unfortunately unable to find any musical pleasure in this...

Midway through, I looked at Jay to see him wearing a very bizarre expression indeed. I think it was supposed to be him pretending to appreciate the music. It looked like he was struggling to digest a hearty meal of shrapnel and pinecones with a gastric band fitted. Idiot.

The next piece was rather more pleasant, a fusion of cello and an electronically simulated open-air background that was rather calming after the first piece. I'm a big sucker for swoopy cello- it takes me to a rather melancholy, blissful state, and when combined with the sounds of the open parkland or a waterfall, I felt like I had been transported into one of those documentaries entitled 'Look just how wonderful but endangered this bit of the world is'. The following piece was what I believe the accelerated descent into madness would sound like. The whole thing was created entirely using the human voice stretched out of all recognisability, while the lead vocalist paced menacingly around the room and told us how mental we were all going. Halfway through, I turned inwards on myself and thought longingly of my beloved science. The solid facts and equations that have so often irritated or confused me now become old friends that I reached out to for comfort. Even Sunaway was looking worried at this point.

The second half was, to my relief, a more relaxed, fun affair, in which the performers did bizarre things and we applauded. 'I can drink without eating, but I certainly can't eat without drinking', an illuminating glimpse into one performer's banal existence, was met with something of an ovation. A girl left the room, something I am perfectly able to do upon command, and received rapturous applause. When they came around and offered us light, though very middle class, snacks, I thought it was the refreshments at the end. But wait! This was music! Never in my life have I applauded a buffet, and I mean never to again.

However, when I lost myself in the daftness of it all, my bewilderment faded and I was caught up in the fun, enjoying it in a somewhat hysterical fashion. I'm not a convert to the experimental genre, but I might go again, just to see what bizzarities they will come up with next.

But not with Sunaway. I hate him. Idiot

**Jammy McCoy**

From the beginning, I could tell that Mr McCoy was happy with the arrangement for this week's concert. He was clearly intimidated by the idea of conceptual music, and my suppressed paternal instinct wanted him to see me as a guiding light; a teacher-

philosopher. I was abruptly torn from my reveries of the boundless potential of my young apprentice upon entering G12, when Victoria Bourne set upon me with a cup of tea. This set the tone for a slightly forced homely aesthetic that I would hesitate for a moment to call 'tinned cosiness', and even longer to call 'Biedermeier at gunpoint', but probably eventually would.

While portions of the small audience engaged in the atmosphere, McCoy and I perched awkwardly on our seats. A fistful of his beloved custard creams did not last him long, and he eyed me hungrily until the opening strains of John Cage's 1958 *Aria*.

As Bourne ascended the podium I realised we were in no kind of living room our upbringing would recognise: We were in a *parlour* (albeit one more at home in Kafka than Austen) and our society matron was about to speak. The unpredictable acapella delivery created a hyperawareness of sound quite contrary to the intended atmosphere. The audience sat stiffly frozen to their seats throughout the menagerie of wild and eclectic vocalisations, afraid to make a peep: the aforementioned tea grew cold.

A small section of the score was reproduced in the programme; it consisted of multilingual barrage of words, set to loosely indicated pitch and utilising undefined colour coding. The work, normally delivered by a single singer, was passed around the group, showcasing its interpretive possibilities as well the persona of each member.

Midway through, McCoy, unconvinced, began nervously glancing at me. I smiled reassuringly, unsure if I was convinced myself, but flattered by his wish for my approval.

The rest of the first half was diverse: Maxine Cheung shone in Simon Birch's music for electronics and cello, as well as a display of imitative chanting sandwiched by her gorgeous extended use of harmonics. One of Bourne's own pieces was here, a recitation of a haiku 'If you hear me here' in various corners of the hall, accompanied by an acousmatic treatment of the human voice. The opening section was intriguing, if the descent into lip-trills and glossolalia a little bit harder to swallow. Bourne exudes confidence and self-assurance, but it was the more vulnerable side of some of the younger performers that redeemed the concert in the second half.

This redemption was heralded by *Living Room Jazz Dance*; Georgie Ward's incredible piano improvisation was joined by each member of the ensemble in turn, and this whirl of scat and strut was full of energy and a slightly offbeat sense of humour. The latter was maintained throughout the concluding trawl through Cage's *Songbook*. There's no denying we saw strange things (including a skateboard and a generous selection of snacks) but it was all greeted with laughter, and not that of an audience united against the music. Perhaps we feel safer with the non-musical theatrics of the *Songbooks* because, unlike the tensely received *Aria*, they bear less comparison to any other form, and are less of a threat to the associated sensibilities. I'm not going to waste space with redefining music or Cage-bashing after knowingly attending a concert of his work, and the ensemble deserves full credit for the easy charm of the second half.

The concert ended with the performers settling down to sleep, and a genuine if slightly relieved ovation. McCoy and I discussed the programme at length, and one disparaging comment of his regarding the *Aria* prompted an enraged gentleman in the next row (who I dearly hope is reading this) to turn around and offer a cerebral and almost coherent defence. Too taken aback and mildly disorientated to say anything at the time, I'd now like to offer him this: Cage without laughing doesn't work. The only time the performers and the audience worked together successfully was when we indulged in the slightly ridiculous; if we're going to laugh at the absurdities of concert etiquette then we have to do exactly that, no amount of intellectual beard-scratching and avant-garde luvvie-ism can have the same effect.

I left the concert buzzing with thought and in need of a pint. McCoy declined my invitation with obvious regret, clearly seeking homely solitude in which to digest this new cultural experience. I hope to work with this promising young naïf again, and foresee a great friendship between us.

**Jay Sunaway**

**Schola Cantorum**  
**Winterbourne Barn, Southmead**  
**Friday May 25**

I've already admitted to not being much of a singer. I therefore wonder whether it is due to some kind of mighty universal prank (or perhaps, the will of a slightly sadistic editor, who thinks he's funny) that I always seem to end up with the vocal assignments. This bi-weekly report comes direct from a concert of middle-age sacred and secular songs put on by Bristol University's resident expert on all musics medieval, Dr. Emma Hornby, and her cadre of elite choristers, the Schola Cantorum (or 'Schola' for short). Still, at least, if nothing else, this should be good opportunity to find out what a 'scooper' is – the word appeared in an anonymous submission to the *Octogenarian* a month ago in reference to a concert by Schola, and for the life of us, no one at *Octogenarian* Central Command has been able to figure out what it means.

This was a concert with a bit of a difference. For one, the venue was neither the usual Victoria Rooms Auditorium nor the Recital Room. No, this was a concert in the Winterbourne Medieval Barn near Southmead. Upon arrival at this incredible historical landmark, I discovered the rigorously trained Medieval experts sprawled outside on the grass, sunbathing, and consuming copious amounts of (rather delicious) cake. I soon learned that cake is a key component to almost all Schola rehearsals – much like biscuits and wind band players. The concert opened with a five-minute spiel by a member of the Winterbourne Barn Trust (they do basket-weaving classes too) who, it must be said, appeared to have ambitions of becoming a stand-up comic. Tonight's set list included, amongst other things, having asked his wife for an iPad for his birthday and having been bought an iRon instead (granted, there was some laughter – polite titters mostly, I think). The first half of the programme was comprised of a wide demographic of medieval chant and polyphony, including music from France, Spain and England. Between each different section of music, Emma Hornby provided an informative and humorous talk, giving the audience a brief context for the compositions. So engrossed was I that several times I found myself wanting to raise my hand and ask questions, before quickly remembering that a) this was a formal concert (the



woman next to me had already given me several funny looks for writing this stuff down), and b) it was being recorded. In terms of performance, the choir blended well, their voices complimenting each other perfectly. These are clearly a group of very talented musicians, able to read and sing so flawlessly from such primitive notation. Indeed, there were very few audible mistakes during the concert, and most of those that did occur were mainly derived from someone changing note too early, totally excusable in a notational form which duration is not necessarily shown.

During the interval, I was finally able to ask Dr. Hornby a few quick questions. I was particularly interested in her conducting style because, of course, one cannot direct medieval music by showing bars and beats. Emma told me that she conducts by showing the note groupings themselves – groups of two notes are shown in the same way as a bar of two; groups of three notes as a bar of three, and so on. She admitted that such direction is often unnecessary, as the choir often know by intuition and from experience which notes she is going to hold.

The second half consisted of a shift towards more secular styles culminating in three motets, again, with an introduction by Mr. Winterbourne Trust (who definitely has comedic ambitions – he just name-dropped Michael MacIntyre). As in the first half, Schola performed superbly; the three motets were as exquisite as anything that had come before. How best to sum up such an evening? Well, I loved it. Who would have thought such simple composition could be so beautiful? And what a perfect setting – middle-age music in a middle-age barn (which was blessedly cool, given the weather). 'Michael MacIntyre' claimed to have been converted; so am I. I genuinely spent most of the concert with a silly grin on my face. Massive congratulations all round to Dr. Hornby and Schola.

Oh, and apparently, a 'scooper' is also called a 'Gollum'...still not a clue...

**Phil Harmonick**

**Mediæval Trio**  
**St George's**  
**Thursday May 24**

A mixture of medieval chant and polyphony, Scandinavian folk music, and contemporary electronic and improvised elements does, I admit, sound weird to the average concert-goer. However, to me and the rest of the *Octogenarian* editorial team, it sounded ridiculously cool, (yes, we had a major music nerd moment). There was even more excitement when we were very generously given two free (FREE!!!) tickets to the concert. However, we soon realised that there was a problem. There are more than two of us in the editorial team. What followed next can only be described as a fight to the death. Bows were sharpened, trumpets were polished, and I'm pretty sure I heard dark chemical mutterings from our resident scientist Jammy McCoy. So you can imagine how satisfied I was when, after casually playing the medieval enthusiast card, I won the right to review this concert. Unfortunately this brought a whole new problem to light: I was bombarded with emails alternatively blackmailing me, worshipping the ground I walked on, and insulting other members of the team; doing basically ANYTHING to get hold of that last coveted ticket. After having to change my phone number, block my ears to the constant ringing of the doorbell, and make several calls to the police, I finally decided to grab the nearest Scandinavian person I knew and, whether they liked it or not, drag them along to the concert. Who knows, they could be useful as a translator and if the editorial team could feel just a bit of the pain I'd felt over the past few days then I would be happy. What followed in the concert was one of the oddest but most enriching experiences of my life. The Trio Mediaeval and their singing was absolutely exquisite. More than that, the



medieval chant and polyphony went beautifully with the folk songs from Scandinavia, and the Trio were clearly enjoying singing them.

I especially loved the song 'Sulla Lulla' which, as I was reliably informed by my Scandi companion, was a very beautiful lullaby. Unfortunately, during the first half I wasn't so keen on Arve Henrikson's contribution to the performance. This is not to say his trumpet playing wasn't marvellous, his improvisation interesting and the electronic stuff original: it just didn't feel like it was part of the same sound world as Trio Mediaeval. It was as if we were being dragged from one to the other, kicking and screaming in my case. When they did occasionally work together in the first half, I found it bordered dangerously on Enya territory. Enya territory equals bad. Nobody wants to go there. The second half, though, worked a lot better than the first. Henrikson worked *with* the Trio rather than against them, and the result was thankfully nowhere near Enya territory. According to my companion, who did actually come in useful, they utilised an ancient Nordic method of communication through song. Had this been adequately explained in the programme then the mostly English-speaking audience would have understood: as it was, it could easily have been mistaken for poor singing. Other than that, the second half truly showed what could happen when these sound worlds worked together and the result was thrilling. Although it would have had medieval purists sharpening their pitchforks, I left that concert feeling that, for the first time in ages, I had seen something truly original.

**Desdemona Jones**

### Rant of the Fortnight

I've always been fascinated by sports commentators. The way they comment on every bit of action in a football match with so much enthusiasm and eagerness is really interesting: who really cares about all the tiny details that you'll most likely never remember? I think the basis must be that they are cleverer than the rest of us. They can translate sport to the people in an understandable way. When there is a thrilling moment that makes every sport enthusiast stand up and shout at the telly, your commentator is right there; probably even more enthusiastic and involved than you are.

The closest thing we have in classical music is the reviewer. They are (or pretend to be) more intelligent than the rest of us, but more commonly comment on the action after the event. I would claim that they do it in a more classy way, and I would venture to compare the two. After all, this pamphlet has been made by a mob of angry music lovers who, like the sports commentator, are very enthusiastic about their subject.

The sports commentator is a brave man (or a woman – no stereotypes here) who comments on the action as it happens, unafraid to speak his mind. He must narrate live and in the moment, unlike a classical reviewer, who comes home after a concert, has a glass of red wine and jots down a few ideas on a piece of paper. Probably while listening to a song cycle. He is wearing a tie. He has another glass of red wine while thinking about the concert. He is feeling outrageous. He wants to upset and he is feeling like a rebel. Something big is definitely going to go down in that last paragraph. The people will stand up while reading the paper tomorrow morning, screaming and shouting in a complete rage. They just can't believe he did that.

Imagine the classical reviewer as a live commentator, what would he say? What could possibly be worth mentioning? The tuning of the strings, the conductor arriving on stage, or the endless bowing? It's just not interesting enough. The most exciting thing that could happen is the conductor dropping his baton, and, although that it hilarious, it's got nothing on the events of a boxing match. Concerts are just unlikely to have any events that need to be communicated to the people as it's happening. It's really not interesting enough.

Now you've almost come to the end of our issue, please read through it again in the voice of your favourite sports commentator. Because this is as interesting and rebellious as it gets in classical music.

Gwendolyn Winthrop

### Royal News and Events

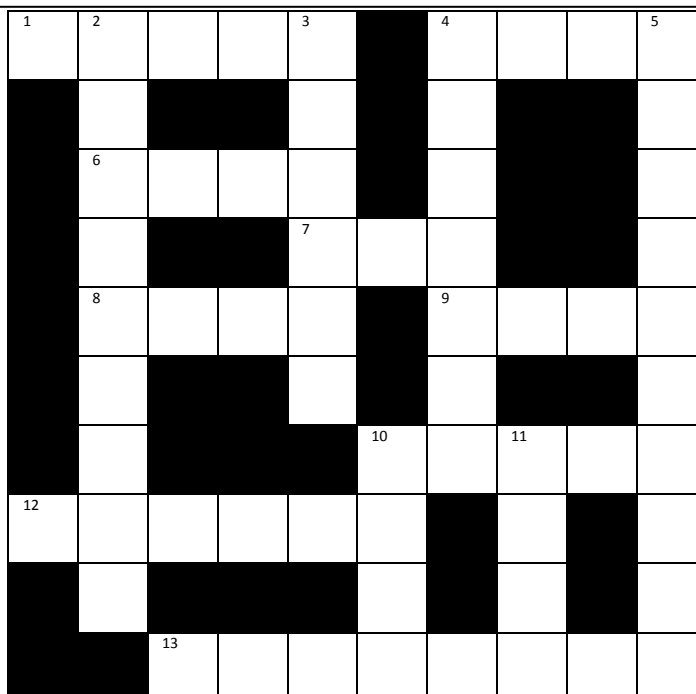
- The Westminster Quarters, made famous by Big Ben and other less interesting bells, has been remixed by dubstep artist Flux Pavilion. Londoners initially responded with outrage, but have since found themselves unable to resist the hourly 'drop'.
- Peter Maxwell-Davis has announced his intention to engage more with his role as Master of the Queen's Music, and will be composing a musical based on the life of Prince Phillip, simply entitled 'Ghastly'. The work is set to premiere later this year, and will feature a parade of multicultural song and dance numbers, each commented upon by the Duke himself in his trademark recitative style.
- The Queen has lost her headphones. Could anyone who has found a union-jack print Skullcandy headset in or around St James' Park please contact the palace as soon as possible. 'I've borrowed Harry's', the monarch appeals, 'but the bass response is just so weak.'

#### Across

1. 'How may we \_\_\_ thee, who are born of thee?' (5)
4. Tail end of a piece (4)
6. K.D. \_\_\_, country singer (4)
7. Corn in Oklahoma grows as high as this elephant facial feature. (3)
8. A bit of Arvo? (4)
9. German song was not entirely honest (4)
10. Singing mermaid is alarming (5)
12. *Muppets* drummer (6)
13. Secular Renaissance vocal piece (8)

#### Down

2. Wooden tuned-percussion instrument (9)
3. Hungarian/Austrian composer (6)
4. Italian baroque composer (7)
5. Inadvertent sharp or flat? (10)
10. Drunkenly link notes (4)
11. Wagner's big cycle (4)



Crossword by Jay Sunaway

Answers to [octogenarianbristol@gmail.com](mailto:octogenarianbristol@gmail.com) to win a thing of Fruit Pastilles.