

# In concert with the Canterbury Orchestra

**The Canterbury Orchestra is a community-based organisation that makes music for enjoyment and put on some of the most spectacular live concerts for the public.**

Formed in 1954 by three local musicians, twins Douglas and Seymour Gaywood, and Douglas Hopkins, the Canterbury Orchestra was set up for 'talented amateur players in the Canterbury area' and held their very first concert in the Cathedral Chapter House in May 1954 under the leadership of Christopher Peto.

Fast forward 68 years and the Orchestra is still going strong today, and with a broad range of ages from students to seasoned musicians, some of whom have been playing with the orchestra for over 30 years, they bring together a powerful and productive blend of youth and experience.

We caught up with Nella Lechowicz, from the Canterbury Orchestra, to find out a little bit more about the group of talented musicians and some upcoming performances our readers can keep an eye out for.

## What does it mean to be a community-based organisation?

"Canterbury Orchestra is a charity and is affiliated to Making Music and supported by the Canterbury Arts Council. We make music for enjoyment and to put on live concerts for the public. As an orchestra we typically have around 40 or more players for any given concert.

"Our players are amateur musicians drawn from the local area and we use soloists who are local too. As well as Canterbury and the villages around it, we draw musicians from the north and east Kent coast, and from the student community attending the city's universities."

## Can you give our readers an insight into what a typical practice session and performance might involve as part of the orchestra?

"The orchestra meets to practice on Wednesday evenings during term time at St Stephen's School in Canterbury and we normally perform 3 concerts each year, mostly at the University of Kent's prestigious Colyer-Fergusson Hall. Not all of our concerts have been in our home city and over the years the Orchestra has performed in many of the towns and villages of East Kent.

"Our most recent concert in March involved a collaboration with Dance Whitstable, whose students danced alongside us in a performance of ballet music from Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake and we also played his Fifth Symphony in the latter half of the concert.

"Members of the orchestra have usually been learning their instruments for a number of years. Some will have had lessons at school and are maybe returning to playing after a break, and others have learned their instruments as adults. Some are very keen players.

"We aim to be open to players of all availabilities and provide a supportive atmosphere. We are always looking for new members, though they must have reached a standard where they can play the music. The music which we perform can be enjoyed by all, from young to old and can be a fantastic opportunity to experience classical music played by, and performed in your local community."

## What are some of the social and mental benefits to being involved and playing in an orchestra such as your own?

"Amongst the benefits of playing are mixing with people of all ages, keeping the brain and body active and enjoying the team work necessary for adding to the musical life of Canterbury by providing a varied programme of concerts for the local community.

"However, the benefits are truly endless – playing can provide a boost to self-esteem and confidence as well as provide relaxation and escape from the busyness of day-to-day life."

One of their members Prudence, mentions that "Even if you are feeling tired or out of sorts, you make yourself go to the rehearsal and

invariably end up feeling invigorated and so much better than if you had stayed at home".

The group not only meet for music-making, but also provide a friendly meeting place for people with a common interest; many of whom have formed long-term friendships.

A recent study conducted by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra found that listening to orchestral music helped boost mood in times of worry, improved concentration and helped people to improve their mental health especially over the past couple of years where we have had lockdowns and restrictions.

The Canterbury Orchestra are currently progressing with rehearsals for their summer concert "A Musical celebration of American Independence Day" to be held at the Colyer-Fergusson Hall (University of Kent), on Sunday 3rd July at 7:30pm.

The programme includes a selection of music from West Side Story (Bernstein), Star Wars (John Williams) and Rhapsody in Blue (Gershwin).

Tickets priced at £15/£8 (concessions) will be available from the Gulbenkian box office at [www.thegulbenkian.co.uk](http://www.thegulbenkian.co.uk) / 01227 769075.

If you would like details about future concerts, or to find out more information, please visit their website on [www.canterburyorchestra.org.uk](http://www.canterburyorchestra.org.uk)

If you would be interested in joining, email the Orchestra Manager, Sue Gray on [sgcorch@gmail.com](mailto:sgcorch@gmail.com).

by Callum Knowles

