



Follow the leader

THE Solway Sinfonia is fortunate to have a high standard of musicianship in all its sections, and because we have this in good measure among our strings we can tackle the more challenging works in the orchestral repertoire. The string section is the engine room of any orchestra and therefore must always be on top form. Weaknesses among the strings can never be fully disguised, no matter how proficient the woodwind and brass might be.

For this forthcoming concert the orchestra has been significantly enhanced by the introduction of a new leader; John Phillips. Of course, confidence rates highly among the many qualities required of a good performance and as the conductor, it is my responsibility to attempt to instil this. Careful rehearsal of difficult passages in the music is perhaps the most valuable means but what must not be underestimated is the role of the leader, as good leaders have the "hands on" advantage over the conductor.

They will have mastered all the difficult passages, have worked out the best fingering and bowing, and can demonstrate technique and musicianship to the rest of the strings. Their position at the front of the first violins makes them almost as visible to the orchestra as the conductor, and the assurance of their playing can spread confidence all round. A good leader will be "followed" by their section, and all its

Geoff Keating is in no doubt about what can help to make the 'perfect' orchestra

TEAM TALK: Geoff and John pause for a moment during rehearsals



OUR MAN AT THE HELM

John Phillips was born in Sheffield and from 1968-71 he read Classics at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge where he was a founder member of the Fitzwilliam String Quartet.

They became Quartet in Residence at York University and in 1972 gave the British premiere of Shostakovich's 13th Quartet in the presence of the composer.

Later, John trained to be a

barrister in London, and played with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philharmonia and the London Mozart Players. He was called to the Bar in 1976 and joined chambers in Manchester, practising there until 1998. He was leader of the Stockport Symphony Orchestra for many years and played professionally with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, the

Manchester Camerata and the Goldberg Ensemble. In 1998 he moved to Carlisle where he is a circuit judge.

Speaking of the forthcoming concert, he says, "I am delighted to lead the Solway Sinfonia for its next concert. The programme is demanding, particularly the orchestral parts of the Brahms Double Concerto. I am looking forward to an enjoyable and rewarding concert."

players will thereby play better. The ideal leader needs to be respected for his or her musical proficiency and to have the ability to manage people sensitively and constructively; in John Phillips we are fortunate to have just such expertise. He has proved to be modest,

good-humoured and accommodating - in short, delightful to work with. His influence during one rehearsal was palpable and it was not only first violinists around him who spoke of the benefit they felt from his presence. Attracting John to join us was a great boon and

we are all sorry to hear that he must leave us after our next performance. John has been promoted to a key post in London. However, we shall all enjoy his company and his valuable input in the lead up to our concert on November 19 in Easterbrook Hall.



What a night

The annual summer musical party held at Threave Gardens in May was a massive success and sent out a positive statement to our sponsors and patrons. It gave us the opportunity to thank those who have supported us while also reminding them of our aims and aspirations.

Everyone mingled happily in an evening that was filled with musical interludes by orchestra members. As the sunshine

lit up the magnificent gardens, medleys from Gershwin, Scott Joplin rags and the last movement of Spohr's Nonet filled the air.

The classical and quirky paved the way for a resounding finale of Scottish reels arranged for string trio and piano.

A superb buffet, supplied by orchestra members, was enjoyed by all those attending this truly excellent evening.

Horn projects help 'endangered' species

The horn has not been attracting enough young players nationally, hence its status on the endangered list. However, it is encouraging to report that Dumfries and Galloway and Cumbria have been supporting projects in the past year designed to reverse this trend.

Funding came principally from the Youth Music Initiative with some help from Jupiter

band instruments. Solway Sinfonia members Pam Harris, Martin Prowse and Stewarty Band conductor Lesley Sanderson were the tutors in a project and drew on the objectives of the Sound Start scheme. For 28 weeks, two groups of P5 boys and girls in Gretna and Dalbeattie primary schools received an hour-long tuition session learning to play

the horn. They also developed their understanding of music, sang and took part in a full day's course and played before audiences on several occasions.

Both groups enjoyed the experience and displayed a range of real new skills. Four pupils from each group have applied to continue with the horn for another year.

The scheme has been very successful and has shown that there are youngsters well able to progress further with the horn if given the opportunity. In 2006-2007 there will be two new groups in addition to those continuing - a significant regional initiative.

All the pupils have been learning on the 12-foot F horn.

Martin J C Prowse

Exciting programme for November concert

Rehearsals are under way for our autumn concert in the Easterbrook Hall on Sunday, November 19, 2006. The programme has an exciting mixture of favourites, starting with Beethoven's "Egmont" Overture. We are delighted to welcome back Leland Chen, who gave such a stunning performance of the Beethoven

Violin Concerto two years ago. This year he will be partnered for the Brahms Double Concerto by Sally Pendlebury on cello. Sally is a founder member of the Vellinger Quartet and has a distinguished history as a soloist.

The second half of the concert will be Faure's beautiful orchestral suite of Pelléas et

Mélisande, followed by Haydn's Symphony No.103 "Drumroll" - giving the percussion section the chance to "let rip" promising a rousing finish. Tickets for November are £9 (student £5).

Our website has been upgraded - www.solwaysinfonia.org.uk - it's well worth a look.

Keating lecture

As part of the University of Glasgow's Dumfries and Galloway extra-mural group, Geoff Keating will give a lecture about the music at our November concert.

It is at Gatehouse Parish Church hall on Thursday, November 16 and admission is £6. It will provide an insight into the music and its history.