

Musical festival triumphs

The second English Music Festival has taken place in and around Dorchester-on-Thames with the aim of celebrating the diversity of Britain's unique musical heritage. A series of 19 events — concerts, recitals and talks — took place at various South Oxfordshire venues over May 23rd to 27th.

Reflecting on the success of the event, managing and artistic director, Em Marshall, said: "Once again we have received remarkably warm support from the local community in Oxfordshire, as well as from much further afield, to this second festival showcasing English music. It was wonderful to see so many people join us in these beautiful surroundings over the Whitsun Bank Holiday weekend."

The BBC Concert Orchestra under Barry Wordworth got proceedings off to a flying start at the opening concert in Dorchester Abbey, with a programme consisting of Hubert Parry's *Jerusalem*, Alexander Mackenzie's *Benedictus*, Josef Holbrooke's *Birds of Rhiannon*, Alan Rawsthorne's *Practical Cats*, and the *Celtic Symphony* by Granville Bantock. Actor Jeremy Nicholas took the role of narrator in *Practical Cats*, with words by T.S.Eliot. For those who missed it, this concert has been recorded for broadcast on BBC Radio 3 at a later date.

Saturday's main evening concert in the Abbey showcased the Milton Keynes City Orchestra with Hilary Davan Wetton, conducting Vaughan Williams, Norman O'Neil, Frank Bridge, Holst and Pastoral: *Lie strewen the white flocks*, a work written by Arthur Bliss inspired by Sicily. The flute solos on this occasion were provided by international flautist, Ileana Ruhemann.

Other highlights over the five days included an outstanding evening of 18th century music by neglected composers Thomas Arne and Thomas Linley, featuring soprano Elena Xanthoudakis with The Cannons Scholars.

During the daytime packed houses enjoyed programmes of well-known and not so



Andrew Swait (treble) joined countertenor James Bowman in a programme of English music down the ages.

well-known Elgar, Vaughan-Williams, Holst, Finzi, Ireland and Howells at both Sutton Courtney Church and the Silk Hall at Radley College.

A service of Matins at Keble College Chapel provided the opportunity to hear Arthur Sullivan's church music, and late evening concerts included the Dufay Collective performing contemplative music from medieval England, and an energetic and entertaining recital of music by Billy Mayerl played by the pianist, David Owen Norris.

The Festival was fortunate to be joined by international counter tenor, James Bowman, who featured in a programme of English song from Purcell to Britten, and which included four first public performances.

Philippe Graffin, the French violinist, found time to interrupt his busy recording and performing career to play Delius, Alwyn and Britten, while brilliant new Greek pianist, Panagiotis Trochopoulos, brought a programme of Joseph Holbrooke. Those who came along to this unusual and exciting recital will be interested to hear that a recording of these pieces is due for release from Cameo Classics.

Henley Standard prize-draw winner, Gillian Kelley, joined artists, composers,

sioned pieces for the festival by contemporary composers, which were both tuneful and accessible. The Southern Sinfonia performed a sprightly *Festival Overture* by Matthew Curtis to open the evening, followed by Nicholas Daniel performing a moving new Oboe Concerto by Paul Carr.

The London Chorus then joined forces to perform Cecilia McDowall's *The Skies in their Magnificence*, followed by *Jubilate* by conductor for the evening, Ronald Corp. The second half consisted of Philip Lane's *Lyric Dances*, and finally an effervescent *Piano Concerto* from David Owen Norris.

Conductor Ronald Corp said: "There is such a wealth of great English music that it is vital that the English Music Festival continues to flourish. In the past we have been shy about trumpeting our English music heritage, and have neglected great swathes of the repertory, making it all the more important that such a festival offers the chance to unearth and explore some of the hidden riches."

This was echoed by conductor Hilary Davan Wetton, who feels that English

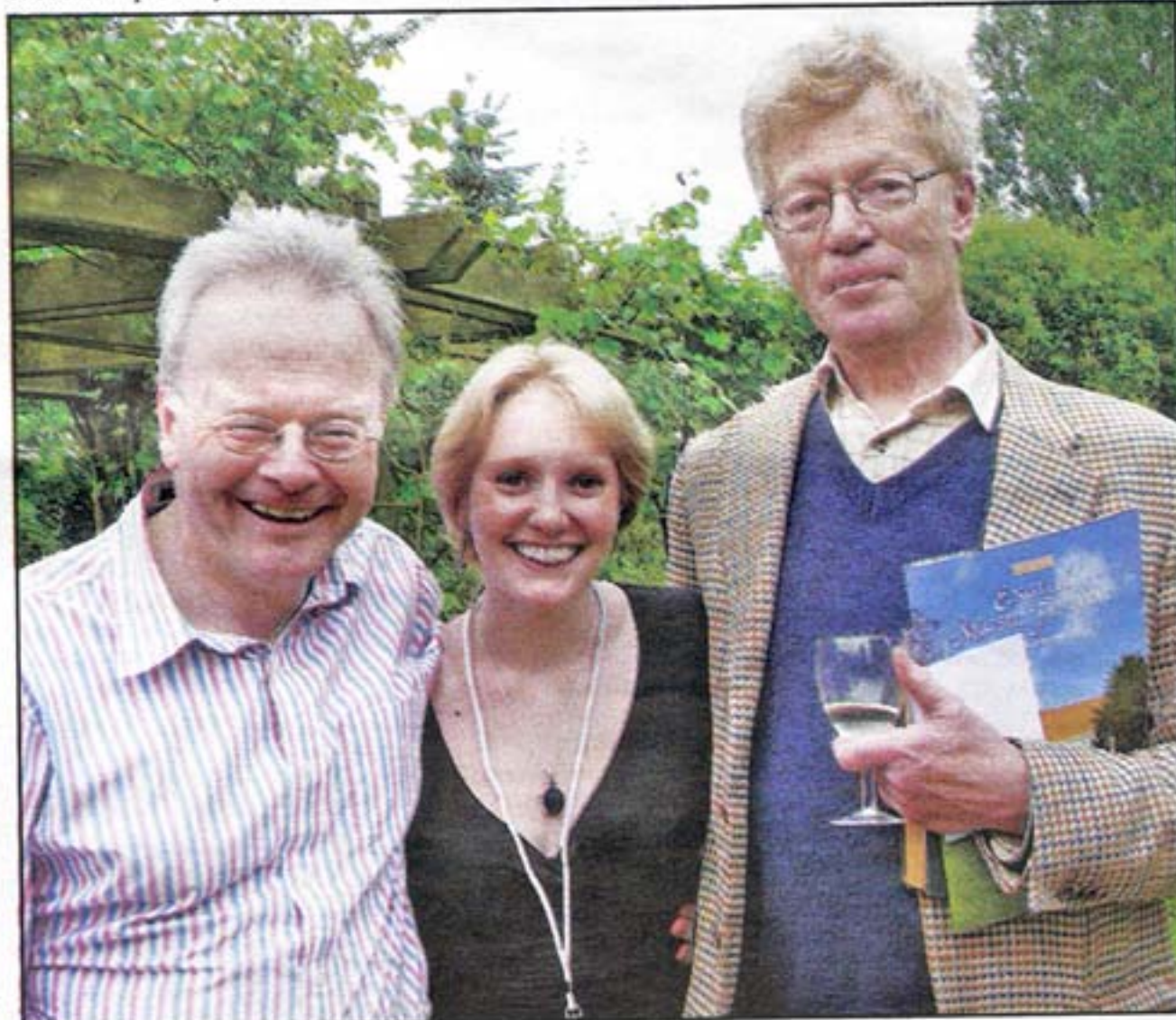
music — particularly that of the 19th and 20th centuries — has been shamefully neglected by promoters and broadcasters in this country since the Second World War.

"At a time when we are being urged by politicians of all parties to celebrate our national cultural heritage, the role of music should surely be central," he said.

"Most concert promoters in this country continue to focus on a very small number of works by an even smaller number of composers. Em Marshall has a crusading spirit which she has translated into the organisation of the English Music Festival, providing an opportunity for the public to hear performances of astonishing quality and diversity in the evocative surroundings of Dorchester Abbey."

Sadly the festival is without a major corporate sponsor, and anyone who would like to support the continuation and growth of the Festival is asked to get in touch with the *Henley Standard*.

For information about the English Music Festival and how to support it, visit www.englishmusicfestival.org.uk



Artistic director and organiser Em Marshall with pianist and conductor David Owen Norris and vice president of the English Music Festival, Roger Scruton.