34

Spring 2020

LCS NEWSLETTER

How I Motivate my Pupils

Angela East

How do I make an individual lesson fun? How do I get my pupils to want to practise? How do I make the entire cello experience an enjoyable one?

There are 15 children in my teaching practice, aged four to twelve. These 15 children are local and I do not select according to apparent potential. A child is accepted if there is a mutually available space for the lesson and one parent has time to practise with the child. I accept the child whether that child has a difficult home life, a learning difficulty or a disability. I have taught older children and know what the adolescent years are like but this is the current age range.

I am a rigorous teacher. All my pupils learn theory and sight-reading, scales and arpeggios, so how can the lessons possibly be fun? When we finally get on to the pieces, the fingering and bowing have to be accurate and in order to teach something properly, I might have to spend a whole lesson on one bar. We do not move on to the next piece until the current one has been mastered, musically and technically. So how on earth are they motivated at all?

Having been invited to write this, I had a good hard look at my pupils to make sure they actually were motivated and they really are! They all practise daily and they all have bright, excited looks on their faces in the lessons. One of them regularly asks when she can have a 100 hour lesson!

In my opinion, the idea of 'fun' is a snare and delusion! Children, parents and teachers are ultimately motivated by success, so I aim for this instead. If one can achieve fun as well as success this is ideal, but fun on its own could be a very short-term gratification.

I'm sorry this sounds so boring, but success comes largely from regular practising! No magic! Practice is not just necessary to improve playing: that improvement is rewarding in its own right, but it also leads to success and motivation. Not practising becomes a vicious circle in which motivation gradually decreases, and it's important to note that it's not just the pupils who need to be motivated: your teacher will be more motivated if you have achieved

everything they asked for during the last lesson, meaning that you will get a more interesting lesson; your parents will be more motivated to help you as they will feel proud of your persistence and your developing skill as a musician.

I think that a lot of motivation comes from relationships and the personalities of those involved. Does the pupil like the teacher? Just because I am rigorous does not mean that I am unkind. Lessons are approached with enthusiasm and positivity, so any motivation just comes from the way I am. I treat the children like adults and am happy for them to question my playing. I use quite a lot of analogies in my lessons and tell anecdotes to illustrate points - not a deliberate ploy but something that comes naturally. I explain terminology if necessary, relate music to other subjects and give them a lot of praise. Being hard on them does not often achieve much.

Does the pupil get on with their parents? Parents always sit in my lessons, firstly because they can take notes and practise with the child at home and secondly because pupils sometimes need to learn in a sensory way, so I have to touch them occasionally. I talk to the parents as we go along because they are largely responsible for seeing that the practice takes place and they need help to make that easier. I can suggest standard teaching tools, such as games, charts, certificates and bribes of various kinds (shall we call them rewards?). I don't use these much myself but they can be useful at home. Pupils may teach their parents – they love to be able to do something that their parents cannot – and they may give their parents feedback on the practice.

I try not to criticise my pupils. I make a point of telling them what was successful in their playing and then show them how to improve some aspect of it. Lessons have to be interesting, fascinating, funny or crazy - I'm not hugely interested in teaching them to play notes! Parents rightly and wrongly think that their job is to teach their children to do that. Rightly because my role is to teach them how to play, so it is quite convenient. Wrongly, because a piece is chosen to develop a certain aspect of technique or musicianship and this is what needs to be assimilated before the child can move on. I therefore aim to reduce the struggle to read the score. I play a lot during a lesson and the children copy. Lessons are from memory, sight-reading is taught separately and the children know much of the music in advance because they have heard others playing it.

Pieces are not chosen according to difficulty but for the technical and musical content. The difficulty of a piece or the grade you are on is no indication of the quality of your playing but a lot of people are tempted to think it is. There is, however, an order of events in which technique is built up. I think I am rather over-complicated in this respect because I milk every piece but that might be what fascinates them.

Intonation, rhythm and tone production are not ends in themselves but achieved by a process, which makes the learning much more interesting and requires less or no nagging. In fact, if a teacher is constantly repeating advice, that teacher needs to rethink the way that element is being taught.

What about teenagers and adults? I find that the same principles apply to any age. We all work at basics, even those who are on the international stage. It is not shameful to improve one's playing on very simple material. Of course the material might be from more mainstream repertoire but by giving interesting lessons, pupils will be intrigued. One must never stop learning oneself and so add to the experience from which lesson content is drawn.

Of Special Interest

The Vexed Question Of The 'Five-String Cello' Part 2 • Kai Thomas Roth

It is not unreasonable to assume that the advent of metal-wound strings in Bologna in the early 1660s revolutionised the construction of bowed stringed instruments with incredible rapidity. The range of sonorous response on these instruments was widened substantially and it became possible to shorten relevant bass strings to a length allowing greater dexterity for the left hand and thus playability. Likewise, with this shorter string length, a higher treble string could be added.

Early eight-foot basses had three, four, five or six strings and were probably tuned in all manners imaginable and possible, smaller intervals allowing the use of more strings. Whether they were tuned in fourths with thirds, fourths only, fourths with fifths

or fifths only is recorded in certain sources from various periods but can only ever be understood as a snapshot of what existed. All manner of *scordatura* tunings were more widespread before 'modern' Cartesian thinking wished to create norms for everything. Many experimental kinds of instruments that turned out to be less successful or popular than others disappeared without trace. Often, if retained to save having to make a completely new one, these instruments were turned into something quite removed from their original concept.

Piccolo violins, tuned a minor third to a fifth above our full size violin, did exist and disappeared or were re-used as children's violins. Had we sonatas and partitas by J. S. Bach of similar popularity to the cello suites for such instruments we would have the same discussion about lost variants of the violin, but Bach only used it rarely, such as in his first Brandenburg concerto and a few cantatas.

Concentrating on just the physical characteristics of a five-string cello tuned in fifths at a pitch of around 415hz with gut-string technology, possibilities are fully stretched. At the bottom even a wire-wound C-string loses its rich full bodied qualities if the vibrating string-length is too short, and the top E will simply break within a day of playing if it is not to sound too wispy and thin at a given string length and pitch. The ideal vibrating string length is therefore - as always - a compromise. For an instrument tuned in fifths its range over five strings reaches its physical limits at either end depending on that length. It is also the case that the more strings such an instrument has the more this restricts its overall resonance; possibly one reason for the eventual demise of five strings.

In Saxony in J. S. Bach's day, *'da spalla'* instruments may have been the only five-stringed 'cellos' available, but in France at the same time, there existed different instruments. The majority of five-string cellos, made in the manner modern musicians understand the term, originate from France from around the middle of the 18th century. Many makers like Castagneri, Guersan and Salomon left beautiful examples of these for posterity, but older instruments can also be found, including one that used to belong to Anner Bijlsma. Probably made by Nicolas Bertrand, Paris, circa 1720, who is almost exclusively known as a gamba maker, it fits into the physically comfortably compromised size and string length, estimated at 615mm, of a cello with five strings tuned in fifths, given that the concert-pitch in Paris at that time was in the region of 392hz.

J. S. Bach was a well educated and widely travelled man. In the same way that his solo violin 'partitas and sonatas' were composed in the Italian manner, his *'6 suites a violoncello solo senza basso'* were written based on the model of French solo suites for gamba, using French dances and following French fashion. French musicians were certainly at the court of August the Strong in Dresden as well as in Cassel and he was an avid collector of music from far afield. It is therefore at least probable that Bach knew about these French five-string cellos and that he composed music for them.

A further chapter in the five-string field of smaller cello sized instruments was their later occurrence in Britain under the name' Pentachord'. John Joseph Merlin, who came from Belgium, had one made around 1780, which was described by the collector Cheeseman as being tuned in fifths with a fourth at the top tuned to D instead of E, thus facilitating melodic playing on the top strings. These instruments were made and advertised by many of the leading makers in the latter half of the 18th century. They were often used by wealthy amateurs who were also still playing on gambas with professional teachers such as Karl Friedrich Abel. Giacobbe Cervetto and others composed for this type of instrument.

At the end of these musings I would like to return attention to why today we make different styles of instruments at all. With regard to the Bach cello suites we have got used over the last century, through hundreds of recordings, to the sixth suite being played on four strings. The most technically advanced players can almost make the upper reaches of the A and D strings ring like Bach might have intended, but the resonant breadth and sonic reach of a five-string cannot be faked.

Zeal and enthusiasm has over the last century and longer led to mis-ascribing scores of so called 'original' instruments for the purpose of the sixth suite alone. This hindered the serious researcher, but pleasing results for players and audiences were still achieved. My most 'successful' five-string to date was not based on a *bona fide* original 'violoncello piccolo', but one that had been turned into such at some stage.

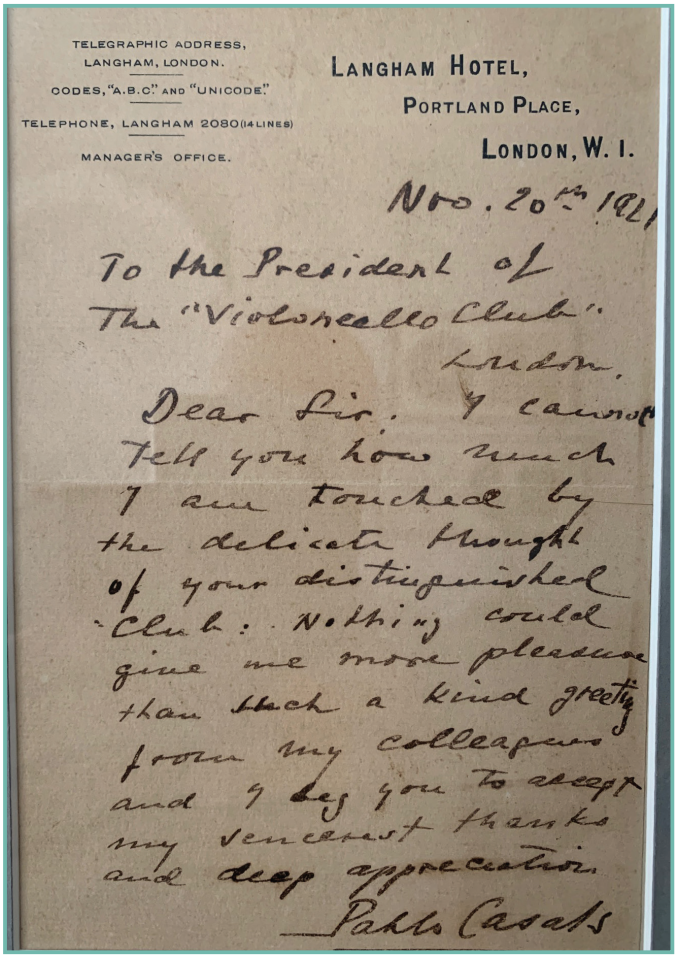
Twentieth and twenty-first century expectations of

the sound of a 'cello' are and can only be biased by our aural experiences of modern instruments we hear most. Our parameters of judgement are always influenced by what we hear habitually.

In the context of 'historically informed performance practice' I personally still find the French model of the slightly undersized cello we know today of the most pleasing sound potential for our modern ears. I have not yet come across a *'da spalla'* small sized instrument that convinced me in the same way but will admit that this may be due to a listening habit bias. Piccolo cello music is certainly not exclusively played from Church galleries anymore. It may also be true that our rediscovered knowledge of gut-string making has not yet caught up with results that were once possible.

The instrument maker of today will concur with Quantz (Berlin, 1752), who said: 'He who with his violoncello does not just accompany, but plays solo also, does very well to have two specialised instruments; one for solo, the other for playing *ripieno*'. He leaves out the question of number of strings. Suffice it to say that we makers can make any variant of instrument a musician would want.

The Casals Letter • Kathy Weston



TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS, LANGHAM, LONDON.
CODES, "A.B.C." AND "UNICODE."
TELEPHONE, LANGHAM 2080 (14 LINES)
MANAGER'S OFFICE.

LANGHAM HOTEL,
PORTLAND PLACE,
LONDON, W. 1.

Nov. 20th 1921

To the President of
The "Violoncello Club".
London.

Dear Sir, I cannot
tell you how much
I am touched by
the delicate thought
of your distinguished
Club: Nothing could
give me more pleasure
than such a kind greeting
from my colleagues
and I beg you to accept
my sincerest thanks
and deep appreciation.

Pablo Casals

For many years, a framed letter has hung on the wall of the cello showroom at J&A Beare's London shop. Dated November 20th, 1921, and sent from the Langham Hotel, London W1, it reads as follows:

To the President of The "Violoncello Club"
Dear Sir

I cannot tell you how much I am touched by the delicate thought of your distinguished Club.

Nothing could give me more pleasure than such a kind greeting from my colleagues and I beg you to accept my sincerest thanks and deep appreciation.

Pablo Casals

A letter from the genius who revolutionised the cello as a solo instrument is a valuable relic in its own right, but there's also a puzzle associated with this one: who was the addressee, and why was Casals thanking him? The story turns out to be fascinating.

First, what was Casals doing in London? In 1921, the Langham Hotel was a three-minute walk from London's principal concert venue, Queen's Hall, and it turns out that on the afternoon of November 19th, Casals was the soloist in a concert with the New Queen's Hall Orchestra, conducted by Sir Henry Wood. The Analytical Programme, price one shilling, records that after playing the Haydn *Concerto in D* with the orchestra in the first half, Casals returned alone after the interval for Bach's *Suite no. 3* in C. So conceivably, the Beare's letter is a response to some fan mail after what was no doubt a wonderful Saturday afternoon treat for London's cello aficionados.

Casals seems to have been on fairly formal terms with his correspondent, so perhaps they hadn't met before. His name was Herbert Walenn, and he was a fifty-one-year-old professor of cello at the Royal Academy of Music, with a successful career as a chamber musician behind him. Two years previously, in response to the upswell in interest in the cello stimulated by Casals's virtuosity, Walenn had founded the London Violoncello School, designed to improve the standard of amateur cellists in southern England. It was the first institution to specialise solely in teaching the cello, and in its

Concert given by the London Violoncello School in 1925.
Herbert Walenn is conducting, John Barbirolli is leader
Image reproduced with permission from the Royal Academy of Music, London

heyday had in excess of 100 students, both children and adults, all of whom were showcased, either solo or as a massed cello orchestra, in their annual Wigmore Hall concerts, and in smaller events at Duke's Hall. London Violoncello School pupils and alumni were automatically members of its social wing the Violoncello Club, which put on private concerts, often featuring famous cellists, at their headquarters in Nottingham Place. It was on behalf of the Violoncello Club's members that Walenn had written to Casals to express his appreciation.

Google Herbert Walenn, and his name crops up in numerous accounts and obituaries of his famous pupils; during the 34-year life of the London Violoncello School he taught, amongst others, William Pleeth, Zara Nelsova, Vivian Joseph, John Barbirolli and Jacqueline du Pré. He seems to have been a thoroughly good thing, as evidenced by the affection in which many of them held him. After Walenn's death in 1953, Barbirolli wrote: 'he was that rare thing, a great master of his instrument, and perhaps an even greater master in the art of passing on his knowledge... His mind remained up to the last open to any originality of approach to problems of technique, besides which he possessed a wonderful gift of guiding and developing talent.'

Whether the Beare's letter was the continuation of an existing acquaintance, or the beginning of one, Casals and Walenn became friends. Shortly afterwards, Casals was appearing on the letterhead of the London Violoncello School as its Patron, and in 1927, commissioned by Walenn, he composed *Sardana for Cello Orchestra* for the School. Casals himself conducted the premiere in June 1927 at Nottingham Place, with an orchestra comprising sixteen professional pupils and ex-pupils of the School. The public premiere took place the following March at the London Violoncello School's Wigmore Hall concert, conducted by John Barbirolli, who by this time had embarked on the career for which he is best-known. Barbirolli and the London Violoncello School orchestra also recorded it for HMV.

Sardana has become a staple of the cello ensemble repertoire, but perhaps its most significant performance took place on December 30th, 1946. To mark Casals's seventieth birthday the previous day, Walenn assembled 60 professional cellists, who were paid the princely sum of three guineas each by the BBC to record *Sardana*, again under the baton of John Barbirolli. The performance was broadcast on the BBC Home Service at 7pm, and a quarter of a century after his Beare's note, it prompted another letter from Casals to Walenn, this time far warmer:

Dear Friend.

What a superb performance of Sardana. I listened with such joy, emotion and gratitude.

Thank you, dear friend, for this perfect proof of friendship. My thanks, also to all our colleagues who were playing in Sardana. I rely on you to convey my appreciation to them; I am writing a note to dear Barbirolli.

I am most deeply touched and grateful.

Yours,
Pau Casals

Kathy Weston would like to thank Simon Morris, Hoon Mannifield, and Gabrielle Gale and her colleagues at the RAM Museum for help in researching this article.

Cello Talk

Robert Max in Conversation with Adrienne Powell

Robert recently performed Bach's *Six Suites for Cello* at Hampstead Synagogue to a packed audience. Adrienne Powell asked him to answer a few burning questions.

What inspired you to play Bach's *Six Suites for Cello* all together in one concert.

In 2015 I heard Yo-Yo Ma play all the Suites at the BBC Proms in a late night concert. The hall was packed and it was the most amazing experience. I found the audience's silent, rapt attention astounding. In no sense is this music 'easy-listening' but there were 5000 people hungry to hear every note. I've been playing one Suite each year at www.frintonfestival.com which I organise each May on the Essex coast and I thought that before I get past my sell-by date I should have a go at playing all this music this way too.

Have you played these Suites before in one concert?

Having made the decision to play all six Suites together in Frinton I immediately knew that this couldn't be a one-off. For a start, it's just too much work to prepare and I also knew that I would have to grow into the experience of performing it. The Festival weekend is exciting, but as I perform in almost every concert there would be too much on my mind to be playing the Suites together for the first time.

So I called a friend in Cheltenham who organises concerts and asked if he was interested. The concert date was fixed within twenty minutes and I realised that yes, there would be broader interest in my little project. So I've also performed the Suites at Queen Mary, University of London alongside Professor Victoria Sanz-Moreno exploring cell biology, at Riverhouse Barn Arts Centre in Walton-on-Thames, at SJE Arts in Oxford, at Tom Woods Cellos in London, where I played each suite on a different cello, and in Hertfordshire in aid of Benslow Music's 90th Anniversary appeal. Future performances will be at Conway Hall and in Cambridge Summer Music Festival. Everyone's interest has genuinely exceeded my wildest dreams.

Many people in the audience commented this seemed a significant marathon for a musician to play this all in one concert. How did you prepare?

When I was young I only learned a handful of the movements. While a student I studied a couple of the complete Suites and performed them a little. But since starting to teach the cello 30 years ago I have been working with my students almost every day on this music. We have explored from so many different angles how to approach it, how to study it, how to understand the music from a musical as well as technical standpoint, how to memorise it. I've shared with my students all the 'tricks', though if I'm honest I've learned much more from them than they learned from me!

Of course you never stop learning. The other day I read Anner Bijlsma's *Bach the Fencing Master* and this shed fresh light on many aspects of playing this music. A few years ago Selma Gokcen suggested I buy a copy of Charles Medlam's *Approaches to the Bach Cello Suites* and this proved revelatory. I find his open-minded approach thought-provokingly refreshing and the wealth of source material that he mentions spurs me on to further exploration.

The only Suite that I really had to learn from scratch was the fifth, and I decided to teach it to myself exactly as I would have taught it to one of my students. I discovered that I'm quite a task-master!

It was fascinating to hear how the music changed between each Suite. Can you tell us what you think Bach was trying to convey?

I find it fascinating that as Bach writes more, he has more and more ideas, not less, like most mortals. He picks the smallest idea and spins it outwards in spiralling, widening circles in ways that are so perfect that they sound inevitable. Which of course they aren't. If they had been, many other composers would have written as successfully for solo cello, and so few have managed to achieve this.

Always present is the tension between the idea of a dance being something perhaps a little superficial, and it being one of the fundamentals of the greatest western music. Bach explores this tension so beautifully. Some of the dances contain such huge emotion, but it's equally remarkable that others are just very jolly.

As someone who has never played a cello I did not realise there was a five stringed cello and so I wanted to know more about when this was

Robert Max by artist Rob Pointon, "live" painting at the Penkhull Festival, September 2019

originally made, and why and how it changes the way you play. I just kept thinking it must be like playing a new instrument.

In Bach's time instruments weren't as fixed as they tend to be these days. You could tune the strings differently, or play them in different ways, probably depending on where you lived or who had taught you. Bach sometimes wrote for instruments that have since gone out of fashion and the five-string cello is one of them. You can play the sixth Suite on a four-string cello, but it's tortuously hard (unless you are Yo-Yo Ma). So to have a higher string at the top makes life easier and is what he intended.

I studied and performed the sixth Suite when I was a student but after a while I vowed to myself that I wouldn't do that again until I could play it on a five-string cello. Selma offered the loan of her five-string cello as an LCS auction prize some years ago and I gently explored this music on this instrument. When I sold a bow a few years later I used some of the proceeds to buy a Chinese five-string cello that I happened to see in a string instrument shop in West Hampstead. This led me to re-learning the sixth Suite, this time working from an enlarged copy of Anna Magdalena's manuscript. Instead of going up higher on the A string you turn left and play on the new E string. It takes a bit of getting used to, but it's not like learning a new instrument. To be honest, reading from the manuscript in alto clef is more confusing than playing on the E string. The rewards are felt when agility is required in the quicker movements, but even more keenly in the Sarabande and Allemande where double-stoppings ring effortlessly.

The adjustments I need to make are those any cellist would make when playing on an instrument that is less familiar to them. In particular the bow speaks differently from usual, not only in the unique way one might expect on the E string, but also on all the others. The C and G strings are problematic because I find that there simply isn't enough resonance or tension at the lower frequencies. Tom Woods helped by suggesting different C strings to try and eventually I found something that at least sounds tolerable. But it would be unrealistic to expect to find an instrument that would sound as rich and as well-balanced as a fine old Italian four-string cello.

Once you have completed these concerts what is your next big project?

Good question. I'm not sure. All the small projects which make up my musical life take up so much time and imagination that I haven't quite sorted out the bigger picture. But there are all Beethoven's works for cello and piano looming somewhere in the distance and perhaps some concerts playing all of his astounding late String Quartets...

LCS would like to thank Adrienne Powell for allowing us to reprint this updated version of her interview.

From our Members

• From Noel Moffat
More Musings From Adult Beginner Land

Well, my grade 4 exam was passed with the usual "not quite a merit" mark, and my teacher seemed moderately happy (but no posh Swiss chocolate present this time). Scales and aural let me down as usual – I don't seem to be able to count, sing or clap very well.

As mentioned last time, I attended the City Lit two-day string school and learnt lots, including the truly lovely Corelli *Concerto Grosso Op 6*. I'd like to say a big thank you to the tutors - all of them are inspiring teachers!

But enough of me. One of the benefits of joining adult structured music groups, apart from the music, is the opportunity to make friends from a pool of people you might not come across in your normal activities. On occasions we pop into the pub after class for a beer, vino or even a mint tea in a couple of cases. All good stuff! The truly huge number of amateur orchestras dotted around, and welcoming cellists of all abilities, is astonishing. The problem here can be choosing from the sheer number - in London in particular.

Our own London Cello Society sponsors some great classes for adults at the RAM for example, and the freebie masterclasses at the RCM are superb.

Finally, thanks to all the experienced cellists who are so generous with their time and who help us older cellists to get our fingers, hands and brains make a little music!

• From Catherine Wilmers
Music Certificate Exams

An adult pupil of mine spotted these on the Trinity College website. Has anyone any experience of these and whether they are held in the same esteem as the normal exams?

"Trinity's strings certificate exams offer an alternative to graded exams.
• Create your own mini-recital
• Gain marks for programme planning, programme notes and stagecraft
• Receive precise and specific feedback to inform your continued musical development
• Prepare for Trinity's Performance diplomas, which follow the same format as certificate exams
• There is no technical work and there are no supporting tests
Our music certificate exams are open to all candidates, with no age restrictions or other limitations. There is no requirement to have passed lower levels, theory exams or other qualifications. Choose from three levels of assessment representing key stages of musical development: Foundation (Grade 3 equivalent); Intermediate (Grade 5 equivalent); Advanced (Grade 8 equivalent)."

The London Cello Society thanks our members Josh Salter and Kathy Weston for their expert assistance with our newsletter preparation.

Graphic Design by Maria Karamanou