

# 35

Autumn 2020

**Honorary Patron**

Yo-Yo Ma

**Co-founder & Chair Emeritus**

Keith Harvey (1938-2017)

**Honorary President**

Ralph Kirshbaum

**Artistic Adviser**

Steven Isserlis

**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

**Chair**

Selma Gokcen

**Treasurer**

Robert Baldock

**Membership Secretary**

Ines Day

David Bahanovich

Martin Bloomfield

Michael Jameson

Justin Pearson

**Director, Amateurs &**

**Adult Learners Division**

Kim Mackrell

**Beyond Cello Division**

Shirley Smart

**ADVISORY COUNCIL**

Nathaniel Boyd

William Bruce

Pavlos Carvalho

Jo Cole

Sebastian Comberti

Penny Driver

Rebecca Gilliver

Leonid Gorokhov

Lionel Handy

Andrea Hess

Ben Hughes

Ashok Klouda

Robert Max

Helen Neilson

Pedro Silva

**Newsletter Editors**

Josh Salter and Kathy Weston

editor@londoncellos.org

**Contact us**

events@londoncellos.org



## LONDON CELLO SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

### In Memoriam Anner Bylsma

*The London Cello Society marks the passing of our beloved and esteemed Honorary Patron Anner Bylsma with this issue of recollections and remembrances. Over the course of 10 years, Anner gave us three unforgettable events on Boccherini, Bach and Beethoven, bringing the music to life in his extraordinary way, with humour and delight. Fortunately his discography is plentiful and gives us all the opportunity to savour both his solo and ensemble playing in a wide range of repertoire. We miss Anner and are thankful that he shared his musical insights with us.*

Guy Johnston

I'm grateful to the London Cello Society for inviting me to write about my memories of studying the Bach Cello Suites with Anner Bylsma. I was fortunate to have been introduced to Anner about six years ago by Steven Isserlis. I felt compelled to make contact having read his wonderfully entertaining book, *Bach, The Fencing Master*, in which he playfully shares his interpretation of the bowings in Anna Magdalena's manuscript. Knowing that I was due to guest lead the cello section of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, I took the opportunity to make contact while visiting Amsterdam.

On the way to Anner's home just off the Vondelpark (not far from the Concertgebouw), I felt excited yet daunted by the prospect of playing for this musical giant. I remember hearing Anner give a masterclass at the Manchester Cello Festival in the 1990s. I was particularly struck by the inspiring way in which he described musical and physical ideas through anecdotes about life. I couldn't wait to get inside the Bach Suites and to hear his thoughts in person.

I walked down the canal streets after a short tram ride, crossed the road (minding the cyclists along the way!) and, with my cello on my back, gazed up at the leaning houses looking down at me. I was full of anticipation: What would Anner think of my playing?





Working on Bach D minor Suite with Anner

Could I impress him with my newfound knowledge of the Suites inspired by his book? Thankfully, I was put at ease as soon as I stepped through the front door. Bobby, the dog, started barking the moment the bell rang and jumped up to welcome me. Anner's wife, Vera, offered me coffee and cake and, moments later, Anner made his way over to the kitchen table on his Zimmer frame. I was immediately struck by his presence. When we spoke, it was as if I had known him all my life.

This meeting marked the beginning of a special musical friendship. During the last six years of his life, I was lucky to journey through these cherished Suites with him and reach the final two only weeks before he sadly passed away. There's a picture here of Anner and me toasting the Suites at the end of our last meeting. That session was particularly challenging. Anner fired a number of questions at me which left me feeling like I had let him (and Bach) down: "Why don't you play the 5th Suite tuned down? Why do you play the Fugue like a study? Why haven't you come with a five-string cello for the 6th Suite?!" It felt like Anner, who seemed more tired than usual that day, was losing patience with having to repeat himself to novices of the Bach Suites like myself. "You all sing too

much about yourselves these days," he exclaimed, "joining all the notes up and taking no notice of Anna Magdalena's source. The music shouldn't just sing, it should speak! Play that again, I don't hear the words, the meaning. Listen to the notes that aren't there, but which are implied. It is *senza basso*, but we should hear the missing continuo."

Even though Anner was physically unable to play the cello in later life, he continued to relish the opportunity to communicate musical ideas and intricate details in Bach's work, as if the music had only just been created and the ideas had just come to him. Luckily, many of his thoughts have survived, not only in his recordings, but in his inspiring, engaging and often eccentric books—*Bach The Fencing Master*, *Droppings*, *Bach and the Happy Few*, *Grumbler's Bach*.

Through his writings and our in-person sessions, Anner prompted me to reinvestigate the Suites from the perspective of Anna Magdalena's copy. Yet, there was always a sense that there was room for manoeuvre - you could make up your own mind about which notes the slurs are tied to, particularly given the lack of clarity in the manuscript. For example, there are instances when it's hard to interpret a four-note grouping. Is it one separate and three notes together; one separate, two together and one separate; or three together and one separate? Anner would muse over the solutions with a chuckle: "Look how the bowings work out so logically this way. The bow will always come back and isn't it wonderful that not every bar needs to land on a down bow?! Listen to all those inner rhythms along the way and the endless variation. You shouldn't just tie all the notes together mindlessly as if you know better than Bach!"

I think Anner believed that Bach was not only experimenting with a new instrumental language away from the "norm" of repeated bowing patterns, but that he also wished to challenge the player by requiring her/him to remain present in the moment – ensuring the avoidance of automatic, "convenient" bowings (e.g. many notes tied to a slur and the consistent use of down bows at the beginning of bars). There are occasions when long slurs appear in the score (e.g. in the 4th Suite Prelude), but these are rare. Anner would encourage unorthodox solutions. He revelled in the quirks of back to front bowings (e.g. using a down bow on the up-beat of the Gigue in the D minor Suite), going against the grain of "modern" cellists who intuitively use up bows on up-beats and down bows on down-beats.

As a general rule, Anner would only tie two, three or four notes together under a slur (under the hand



*Bach considerations with Anner*

before it has to move position, rather than connecting notes with a shift during a slur). He often suggested staying in lower positions as much as possible, guiding the bow towards the bridge to emphasise important notes and leaving less important notes behind. "Play this bar as if you're looking over your shoulder" he used to say. "Delight in the varying patterns of slurs during sequences - it keeps us entertained, and alive to the inner musical dialogue."

One of my most treasured memories was working with Anner on the D minor Suite\* ahead of a performance at the Weesp Chamber Music Festival just outside Amsterdam. I was to perform the Suite for the first time and was eager to hear his thoughts. Anner's presence was with me throughout the performance. Peeking through the door at the back of the church before entering, I could see a light shining through a stain glass window, reflecting multiple colours on the stage where I was about to play. I was reminded in that moment of Anner's timeless advice: "You should play like a minister preaching from the pulpit. Listen to your audience."

Anner's wisdom remains with me today. His smile, often appearing at special moments when I was able to get to the heart of the music during our sessions, was infectious. My memories of him

continue to live on vividly and I will always be grateful for his patience and wisdom. Writing about the Suites in his book *Bach, The Fencing Master*, Anner captures some of the challenges faced by musicians of the past, present, and no doubt, future when entering the sacred world of the Bach Suites.

*"A Sphinx, that's what Bach's solo pieces for the violin and for the cello have become. Three hundred years of opinions of lesser men - always lesser men than Bach - have made it impossible to read what it says*

*in the wonderfully clear quill-pen texts, of which we all have copies. String music used to be a world of its own, full of idiosyncrasies like up- and down bow, crossing of strings, open string-notes, separate or slurred notes, playing near or far from the bridge, double stops with different lengths and tones with vibrato, with accents, or special diction in the middle.*

*Nowadays, preconceived ideas of people, who do not even play a string-instrument themselves, often are directing our bow-arms. My books about these works should not be necessary at all for anybody, but at this moment they will be one of the few ways to re-discover some of the lost charm of our sphinxes. When string-playing is left to people who can only play to the tune of a "conductor", the price of a Stradivari will soon be equal to that of a good saxophone."*

\*If you would like to see some general notes made during sessions on the D minor Suite, you can visit the LCS website [www.londoncellos.org/Bylsma](http://www.londoncellos.org/Bylsma) for more insight.

All books by Anner Bylsma mentioned in this article can be purchased from: <http://www.bylsmafencing.com/>



Listening for the first time in far too many years to the recording Anner Bylsma made of the C.P.E. Bach concertos I realise how lucky I was to have been playing professionally at that time, particularly in the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Bylsma was one of that wonderful group of musicians, including Gustav Leonhardt, the Kuijken brothers, Frans Brüggen and Nikolaus Harnoncourt, that transformed the way musicians approached baroque music in the second half of the twentieth century.

The recording was conducted by Leonhardt, and two apparently more different characters it would be hard to imagine. Leonhardt was immaculate, restrained in every gesture and spoke English equally immaculately (rather better than those of us born here), while Bylsma was large in every sense - a bit dishevelled, always with a joke up his sleeve and a naughty smile with which to encourage the orchestra. But the recording sessions were a joy. Leonhardt and Bylsma somehow complemented each other in terms of musicianship and obviously held each other in great esteem.

Playing continuo cello when Bylsma was the soloist, as I did in those recordings, was a bit like walking a tightrope. There was always the possibility of falling off, or rather being left behind with egg on your face, while he raced ahead and performed in a delightfully spontaneous way things that he had not thought of in rehearsal. This was mostly great fun and a truly authentic way to play baroque music but I do remember a concert in Bath Abbey where he was what seemed like miles away from me (because the orchestra was squashed into the choir) and I could hardly hear him. He played Vivaldi concertos and was in serious rushing mode so I really could only play hell for leather and hope we finished at roughly the same time!

That concert was also memorable because he brought with him a large box of his just published book, *Bach the Fencing Master*. This book is utterly unique: equally mad and fascinating. It demonstrates as nothing else Bylsma's devotion to Bach and his determination to perform the Cello Suites in a way that reflected Bach's wishes in terms of articulation. A flavour of this book can be illustrated by a quotation from page 44 which I quote exactly as it appears in the book:

**"article: Accusation!** *There is one accusation that an author, writing about 'bowings in the Cello Suites' will not escape: 'Sir, you twist them to suit your private opinions!'*

*As I have no clue how to defend myself against such an accusation - but BOY!, did I try to read what is there! - I will launch a counterattack: 'Sir, you are subjecting Bach to what you learned in school, or to pedantic French orchestral rules, or - for some of you - to the strange wish to fabricate a single line, where there are two or three!'"*

Bylsma believed that no modern edition of the Cello Suites could be recommended. Nor could the Kellner manuscript or the other two anonymous 18th-century copies; the only text that can take us close to Bach's intentions is his wife Anna Magdalena's copy. This copy, the bowings in which many of us find extremely hard to decipher, he believes should not be dismissed as a hurried and mistake-laden version of Bach's articulations but an accurate copy of his autograph manuscript. He does not subscribe to the convenient view that parallel figurations of notes should be played with the same bowings. This, in his opinion, is boring and entirely missing the point of Bach's genius when it comes to the "spoken" quality of his music.

If you need an example of this thinking you need go no further than the first four bars of the first Suite in G. Anna Magdalena gives three (or is it four?) different bowings in those four bars. Most of us (me included) decide to play the same bowing for each of those bars. Oh how much easier it is to decide that Bach's wife was snatching time for copying from her life of looking after all those children and was rather sloppy! But Bylsma believes that every mark on the pages copied by Anna Magdalena is a vital instruction to the player and that it is our duty to Bach's genius to follow them to the best of our ability.

Bylsma's own ability of course was huge and he was able to encompass all the seemingly wild bowings that the Suites display with far more ease than some lesser players. To sum up a book that it is impossible to sum up, whether he is right in his assumptions about the validity of the Anna Magdalena manuscript or not, it is wonderful that he was endlessly fascinated and involved in trying to solve the questions that the Suites pose to us all.

I realise that this piece about Bylsma leaves out vastly more than it contains. I can only hope that it will stimulate cellists who know little of his playing to read his book and to listen to his large discography of solo works and chamber music. It all conveys his joy in music and in playing with others. If I had to choose one recording that gives

the flavour of his delightful personality I think it would be the marvellous C.P.E. Bach concerto in A major, a piece often ignored by cellists who play only the modern instrument. Bylsma's deep understanding of the music of that period, inimitably enhanced by his own effervescence, shines through.

## Of Special Interest

Front Room Concerts • Ollie Mansfield



*Bach Cello Suites event flyer*

It was my penultimate teaching week before the Easter Holidays, and the news was full of stories about the Covid-19 outbreak in Italy, Spain and France. At the end of a day of teaching at school I said to a close friend and colleague half joking, half panicking. "See you in September!" Little did I know that September would be the earliest possibility of returning to work. A few days later cancellation emails arrived and for the first time since graduating my diary was a big blanket of snow.

I had a couple of days of panic and then survival mode kicked in. I had a hunch that I wouldn't be alone in trying to find ways of earning money as a musician online. It occurred to me that I could organise a group for online performances cheaply and quickly. I set up the Front Room Concerts Facebook Group, having done nothing like this

before and not knowing if it was going to work.

For me it was important to keep the beauty of live performance as much as possible, therefore musicians would live stream their performances via their phone, tablet or laptop into the group. I then set up a donations button via PayPal that could be posted onto the comment feed during the performance so that the "audience" could donate. The donations would then be split between the performer/performers and the charity Help Musicians UK.

In such uncertain times, it was also important to create consistency within the group to give members a feeling of security and trust about its aims. Performances are always on a Thursday at 8.10pm. I've used the online design platform Canva (which is also free) to make sure the branding and posts have the same template and theme.

Since the first performance on the 26th March, over 20 musicians have performed (many have been cellists) and over 1,500 members have donated over £2,000. This response has been absolutely incredible! The highlight for me was programming all six Bach Cello Suites in one afternoon with performances by Rowena Calvert, Kirsten Jenson, Pavlos Carvalho, Anita Strevens, Louise McMonagle and myself. It felt like an incredible achievement running the technical gauntlet of live streaming from various locations around the UK, let alone the musical gauntlet of the Cello Suites. It was a huge success and I am very thankful for the courage the performers showed in joining me on this adventure. If you join the Facebook group, a lot of these performances can still be viewed.



Reflecting over this project, there are many aspects I would like to share with you that may be of help to think about:

1. Audience Building/Fan base: I think this will be a very important asset in the future. If you are doing an online performance and it is either a paid event or asks for donations, then the bigger the following the more financial security you will have. I also think this will be an element fixers will have in mind when booking players.

2. The physical live experience is far more valuable: from my experience of live streaming online, it very clear that real world live performance experience is far superior. To share the same energy of sound and atmosphere just doesn't come across online. BUT it is a good way to stay connected with others and keep your purpose and motivation going.

3. Be helpful: it can feel overwhelming seeing and experiencing the huge volume of online activity there is. When choosing content for yourself, choose what is going to be helpful to you. When delivering content, make sure it is helpful to others.

4. "When you stop being afraid, you feel good". I recommend reading *Who Moved My Cheese* by Dr. Spencer Johnson. It a very short book, but very apt for our current experiences. I first read it on the day my son was born, and it was incredibly helpful in adjusting to a new life as a dad. It's a book I still return to when I feel stuck.

Cellists are an incredibly resourceful and courageous bunch! It is fantastic to see the London Cello Society move to online events to keep on enriching our lives. I have now started to see enterprising cellists create online summer cello courses. I am currently exploring how group learning can be carried out online as well. As Jacqueline Du Pré once said: "We cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are."



If you would like to show your support for professional musicians then you can donate to Help Musicians at the following link: <https://www.helpmusicians.org.uk/support-our-work/make-a-donation>

## Cello Talk

### How I Motivate my Pupils: Part 2 • Angela East

#### How do I get my pupils to want to practise?

The secret lies with the parents! Children have two very good reasons for not wanting to practise. Firstly, it is lonely. Secondly, to be successful a mature brain is required, to break down pieces and technical work into small units that can be learned easily. A lone child will simply play everything through, reinforcing the errors. A young child will have no idea of time management or how to practise.

When a new pupil begins lessons with me, the first term is devoted to the parent. The parent does some playing but most of this time is spent learning how

to practise with the child. This would include the structure of the practise (children like routine), the terminology, psychology and the process. Parents begin by spending 30 minutes daily just playing with their child. It is surprising how hard this is for them – they have so little time. Over the years, I constantly explain how to practise. At about secondary school level, the weaning off process begins, with different sections of the practise being done alone and the children beginning to make their own notes.

I hasten to add that this formula is not the same for every child. When the parent cannot grasp the



musical or technical aspects as well as the child or if a child finds the parent annoying, as examples, I start the weaning off earlier. Then there is no point in working at anything if the pupil is not taught how to practise it. One cannot assume that either the parent or the pupil will copy what has happened in the lesson. None of the above will guarantee that a family will enjoy practising but at least they will know what to do, which may be part of the battle.

There is another real incentive, though: the **group lessons**. I hold three of these per term and every meeting is slightly different. Sometimes all the pupils play together and I find ways to involve all of them while the more advanced ones play in unison. Sometimes we have an "orchestra", in which they play different parts, reading from the music. Most of the time I invite a second musicianship teacher, so that two classes run in parallel throughout a Sunday afternoon. Musicianship classes comprise Solfège, composition, aural, theory and African drumming. One meeting annually is a day of pupils' concerts and there is a special annual event to which I invite another cellist or someone with something special to offer.

The classes themselves may be part of the inspiration but the social aspect of these meetings (they normally get tea as part of the afternoon and play together in the garden) and the fact that they become aware of the progress of all the other children, is what spurs them on. I don't encourage competition; that is just part of human nature.

### **How do I make the entire cello experience an enjoyable one?**

It probably helps that I enjoy teaching my pupils. I look forward to them coming to the front door. There are many elements to the subject of music and the difficulty for the teacher is deciding which ones to teach in the short time available.

### **When do I encourage children to go outside my practice to join orchestras and take part in holiday courses or workshops?**

My philosophy is this: at first, children need to acquire the basics of technique. These will affect them forever, so nothing should interfere with that process. Apart from the group lessons, where they are carefully monitored, they should not play elsewhere.

At about Grade 1, children are encouraged to take part in those events that I know are good, such as the London Cello Society's Cello Club autumn event. Playing with others involves a lot of skills that are not learned in individual lessons. Pieces chosen for an ensemble need to be simple enough that pupils are able to listen to and watch others while they are playing. When playing in an

orchestra, there are normally so many players that individuals are not able to hear themselves play, so intonation might go off a bit. Very often conductors choose pieces that are too difficult for children and that sets them back too. Therefore, Grade 5 is the benchmark, after which I do encourage a lot more activities outside my teaching. These activities become absolutely essential during secondary education, as the school will not provide access to music-making at a national level. The quantities of homework quickly erode a student's enthusiasm for late night practice.

Teenagers are thinking for themselves and they question everything about their parents and the older generation. It would be far more worrying if they didn't! At this age, they need to be independent and they need the social angle of all those courses and workshops, especially the summer residential ones. They value their new independence, so I try to encourage them to think for themselves, allowing as much creativity as possible, teaching them about the historical aspects of playing or the variations in tonal expression or ways of performing. Their intellects need to be stimulated, so that the lessons can never be described as boring.

There is so much music in the world that they are bound to love some of it!

During the lockdown I held double lessons on Skype, when the children played to each other and then talked about their performances. These were only 30 minutes long but were of value during this long spell of isolation.

If we are still social-distancing in September, I will hold lessons in my house with three pupils at a time. It could be a while before we revert to the pattern described in this article.

Part 1 of this article can be found in the previous issue (Spring 2020)



• **From Martin Bloomfield**  
The Evocative Smell of Glue



An old friend came to me in February with a damaged cello, and a pleading request for me to repair it. A ready "yes" came out before I could recollect where all my old luthier's tools were, not having used them for some decades. I took the cello in. It had an imploded hole on the top side, the result of it falling on an immovable and sharp piece of furniture. The back, therefore, needed to come off to allow a reinforcing patch on the inside to support the fractured pieces.

I brooded on the project for a couple of weeks then, with my old trusty thin bladed steel kitchen knife. I had the back off in four minutes. A good clean break, one especially welcome at the top end where it joins the neck. I found an old stock of pine veneer and eventually, hidden in the dusty recesses of the attic, the double glue pot with rabbit skin glue pellets.

Smells are particularly effective at reminding one of past occasions, and the rabbit skin glue is especially good at this: it recalled learning violin making from William Luff at the London Collage of Furniture evening classes, spending time with Dietrich Kessler in Withers, his shop in Wardour Street, hours spent in my basement workshop repairing an assortment of stringed instruments, and, for several years, having a stall at the Saturday Portobello Market, selling a range of musical instruments. What a delightful recalling power this glue has!

The hole was eventually repaired, but the virus is preventing my friend from teaching, so I am enjoying playing it in the meantime. I must heat up some of that glue again: what other memories may be lurking there?

• **From Timothy Kraemer**  
My Funny Cello Story

Years ago, as a cellist with the London Classical Players visiting Salzburg during the Festival, I walked into the artists' entrance of the Festspielhaus to drop off my cello back stage ready for the evening concert. At the same moment, the great cellist Heinrich Schiff was giving a lunchtime recital and had just walked off stage after a second or third encore. He saw me with my cello case and in his broad German accent said "You go on now, I've had enough!"

• **From Noel Moffat**  
"Yes, we can Zoom" – Post Lockdown Observations

1. Huge thanks to all the tutors who zoom ed and kept us practising. You know who you are but in my case special thanks to Susanna from West London Strings and ELLSO, and Juliette who zoomed me from Paris every week.
2. Kicked on with the Bach suites (hmm, these might take a while). Tried my hand at a little of the Elgar Cello Concerto; teacher was not impressed ... looks like back to Dotzauer for me!
3. Discovered teacher is correct (as usual) while doing thumb scales. No finger-eating monsters live in the higher registers of the fingerboard!
4. Thanks to all the cello galacticos such as Amit Peled, Steven Isserlis and others who posted phenomenally helpful free tuition on the internet.
5. Very kind thoughts to all the professional musicians who are going to have to try to restart careers. We need you guys if we newbies are going to improve.

• **Robert Max Plays Six Bach Suites On Guildmusic**

LCS Advisory Board member Robert Max recorded Bach's Cello Suites last September, having performed them throughout the UK. The first five Suites are played on the Comte de Saveuse Stradivarius cello dating from 1726 and the Sixth Suite is played on a 5-string cello made rather more recently in China. They will be on general release from September but LCS members can purchase them straight away at the specially reduced price of £16 including postage and packing by emailing Robert at robertmax3@gmail.com.