Brass and percussion take the lead in Proms

The Royal Albert Hall will reverberate to the powerful sounds of brass, percussion and around 100 musicians when a new orchestral piece composed by music lecturer Dr Sam Hayden is premiered at the BBC Proms this month.

Substratum was commissioned by BBC Radio 3 and will be performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra on Tuesday (17 July). It is a seven-part composition within which the brass and percussion, along with the bass instruments, all have very important roles.

One of ten specially commissioned works that will be played at the Proms this year, Substratum follows the geological metaphor of the title.

"The piece is formed by multiple layers of musical material, but there is always the sense of an underlying fundamental layer, not always perceivable, in the low register, on which everything else is constructed and dependent," says Sam.

He adds: "The low instruments in the orchestra therefore have a particularly important function, as there is a recurring bass line that reappears throughout the piece, hence the addition of relatively unusual instruments such as the contrabass trombone and contrabass clarinet. The piano also has an important role, being the only instrument that can play in all registers. The percussion is also very important."

Sam is a Sussex music graduate who began studying mathematics, then turned from playing the trumpet to music composition. "I see composition to some extent as problem-solving. What can I do with this instrument, or orchestra, and how will the different sonic elements relate to each other? It's a bit like inventing the rules to a game, then playing it - but it's also very important to break those rules," he says.

He admits that it is pleasing to be able to give prominence to the brass section: "As a trumpet player I remember sitting in the orchestra, counting the bars' rest and watching the strings play - therefore brass and percussion get many of the important bits here."

Sam is well known as a composer, having previously had pieces broadcast by BBC Radio 3. He has also seen his work performed at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall, the Philharmonie in Berlin and the Pompidou Centre in Paris. The Royal Albert Hall is, however, the biggest venue to stage his work to date.

Sam will discuss Substratum with Dr Björn Heile, head of the Music department, in a pre-concert talk at the Royal Geographical Society at 5.30pm on Tuesday. The piece will be broadcast live on BBC 4 television (including a live interview with Sam during the concert interval) and on BBC Radio 3.

Student fronts campaign for more organ donors

Sussex student Robyn Tainty has been taking time out from her studies to publicise a national campaign to encourage more people to become organ and tissue donors.

As the face of National Transplant Week (7-14 July), Robyn has been telling her story and addressing MPs and journalists about the plight of patients in need of transplants.

Robyn, who is busy completing a part-time MA in Gender Studies, took a break from her research to make a speech in the House of Commons and take a turn as guest on the GMTV breakfast news sofa.

Robyn, 23, has cystic fibrosis, a genetic condition requiring daily treatment to keep the lungs from becoming congested. Repeated infections related to her condition mean that Robyn's lungs are damaged beyond recovery. She now relies on oxygen cylinders to assist her failing lungs and has to use a wheelchair.

A chronic shortage of organ donors means that Robyn has an agonising wait for a double lung transplant as her condition deteriorates. She is one of 8,000 waiting for a transplant - and 450 of those die each year, waiting.

Robyn explains: "I am now on 24-hour oxygen, which has had a big impact on my life, particularly as it has hampered my much-valued independence. I try to maintain as normal a life as possible, but this is getting harder as my tiredness and breathlessness get worse. Essentially, my world is getting smaller."

As she waits for news of her own situation, Robyn is determined to get on with her life. With support from the University and her tutors, she is writing up her MA thesis, on women and binge drinking, and is now planning to begin a doctorate, researching cystic fibrosis patients and their carers.

She says: "When I am ill or in hospital I still manage to do my work OK, I just do it in bed."

"There is so much more I want to do with my life, but I am only too aware of the huge shortage of donors. However, I am trying my very hardest to stay positive and enjoy what is left of my life to the best of my ability, however limited it may be."

Robyn is asking everyone to consider signing the NHS Organ Donor Register. You can do so online at www.uktransplant.org.uk or by phoning 0845 60 60 400.

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Sussex Philosophy department is "women-friendly"

The Society for Women in Philosophy has recognised the Philosophy department at Sussex and four other universities in England and the USA for being "women-friendly".

"Each of these department engages in practices that help to foster a women-friendly environment," says the Society.

The Society highlights progress at Sussex on redressing gender balance in the profession: since 2003, five out of the department's seven full-time permanent appointments have been women, making the teaching staff approximately 50% female; nearly 50% of undergraduates and 33% of postgraduates are women; and the head of department will soon be a woman.

The Society draws attention to a number of other "women-friendly" features at Sussex:

- the inclusion of women philosophers on the syllabus in at least nine modules or courses
- the fact that women in the department work in a wide range of areas the child-friendly atmosphere, with teaching scheduled around childcare commitments
- the friendly and collegial environment.

"Some of these are vague and of course a matter of subjective judgement," says the Society, "but they are important nonetheless."

Mary Wollstonecraft (above) and Simone de Beauvoir (below): both eminent female philosophers.

Sussex pioneers language course for refugees

The Sussex Language Institute is a partner in an innovative pilot course designed to provide intensive support to refugees who are planning to go to university.

The free course in English for Academic Purposes has been developed in response to evidence that a lack of high-level English provision is one of the major barriers to refugees' participation in higher education.

The project is a partnership between the Sussex Language Institute, the School of Languages at the University of Brighton and the Friends Centre in Brighton. Successful completion of the six-month course will allow progression to courses at Sussex or Brighton.

While most universities run pre-sessional language courses for international and overseas students, there are few opportunities for refugees and migrants who do not have English as their first language to gain similar skills.

The new course is funded by the European Social Fund and the Learning and Skills Council.

Teenagers explore the fun of chemistry

More than 100 students from schools all over the UK found out what makes fireflies glow and investigated the properties of the painkiller Benzoicaine in a residential chemistry programme at Sussex this month.

The two back-to-back three-day Salters' Chemistry Camps focused on pharmaceutical chemistry, giving the 15-year-olds the chance to delve into areas of chemistry that are perhaps not covered at school.

Professor Norman Billingham, who was involved with running the camps, said: "This is a fantastic way to get young people enthusiastic about chemistry.

"We've been running Salters' camps for four years now and we are starting to see previous campers applying to read chemistry in Sussex and other universities, so they are doing a great job for the subject."

But it wasn't all lab work. There was a varied social programme for the campers, including tenpin bowling and a fun quiz.

The chemistry camps were sponsored by the Salters' Institute; GlaxoSmithKline; the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); the Institute of Chemical Engineers (IChemE); the Royal Society; the Royal Society of Chemistry; and the University of Sussex.
Helping teachers to spot the emotional needs of their pupils

Sussex psychologists are carrying out research to accompany national strategies to help teachers improve the emotional, behavioural and social well-being of schoolchildren.

A team led by Dr Robin Banerjee used questionnaires to determine how classmates felt about themselves and each other and how teachers felt about individual students.

The results, which classified children into “popular,” “rejected,” “neglected” and “controversial”, will help teachers understand the dynamics of the classroom and improve poor behaviour.

One of the studies was part of an evaluation by Ofsted of the government’s Secondary National Strategy pilot programme. It was carried out in eight secondary schools prior to a national drive.

One of the tools was a ‘sociometric’ questionnaire, which enabled an assessment of children’s peer status. Children were asked to nominate three classmates they would choose to spend free time with and three they would avoid. Using this information, the researchers were able to calculate levels of peer acceptance and rejection experienced by each pupil.

Approximately 15 per cent of children were classed as relatively popular (six positive nominations or more) and were seen as significantly more co-operative by peers and teachers and with greater leadership qualities.

Pupils who received less than one positive nomination and six or more negative nominations (about 13 per cent of the class) were seen as significantly less co-operative by peers and teachers and reported higher levels of loneliness and social anxiety.

Robin said the purpose of the initiative was not to make children more popular, but to understand the dynamics that help to make the classroom more harmonious.

“Our assessment can give a richer picture of the emotional functioning of a class and give teachers an insight into what is happening,” he said. “Once children’s needs are identified, schools can use a range of interventions, such as buddy systems, mentoring and group activities, to fill the gaps in these children’s emotional functioning.”

Overall, although the Secondary National Strategy’s pilot programme was initially met with resistance by teachers, Ofsted found that it was most effective when teachers adapted their teaching methods to take account of pupils’ needs.

As a result, pupils displayed more respect for each other, worked better in teams and were better able to articulate and recognise their feelings. In particular, pupils’ ability to cope and recover from challenges and change and their willingness to take risks had improved.

For more information about the Secondary National Strategy pilot programme, see www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070048

A walk on the wild side

Our wanderings around campus have often given us occasion to mention the odd non-native plant that had taken up temporary residence, usually where there had been some disturbance caused by contractors’ machinery.

Normally, these evoke no more than a passing interest.

However, a few weeks ago Dr Libby John reported a patch of Japanese Knotweed on the side of the road leading to the Falmer Sports Complex. Now, Japanese Knotweed is serious bad news as it is one of the most persistent and invasive of all introduced plants. Hence a quick phone call to Andy Jupp in Estates resulted in swift appropriate action being taken. The patch was quickly treated with glyphosate, the rhizomes dug out and the whole incinerated on site.

Japanese Knotweed, Fallopia japonica, is a native of Japan, Taiwan and northern China and was first introduced into Britain in 1825. It was enthusiastically cultivated by Victorian gardeners, who had no forebodings of the trouble that they were building up. It was first recorded in the wild in 1860 growing on cinder tips in Maesteg, Glamorgan. It spread rapidly between 1920 and 1940, first reaching Sussex in 1921.

Over the last 40 years it has increased its range substantially and now occurs throughout the British Isles, colonising waste ground, roadsides, railway banks, stream and river banks and waste tips – forming dense thickets of stiff bamboo-like stems up to about three metres high by mid-summer.

Not content with introducing plants, from 1876 onwards our Victorian ancestors also released Eastern Gray Squirrels from North America for release as living garden ornaments. Despite being attractive animals, Grey Squirrels (as we now call them) are widely regarded as an ecological disaster.

In particular they get blamed for the near-extinction of the Red Squirrel in Britain, mainly because they carried across the Atlantic a myxovirus that is lethal to their smaller cousins. Ironically, the other charges against Grey Squirrels – damage to forestry and predation of bird nests – were made less than a human lifetime ago against Red Squirrels, persecuted ‘pests’ then but now conservation icons.

Grey Squirrels have been on campus rather longer than the University, arriving in the 1930s. Usually litters of about three young are born between late February and early April and become independent of their mothers around now.

Every year a few females give birth after April. This year has been an exception, with many summer litters. Rather than being genuine second litters after a successful first attempt, given the dearth of juvenile squirrels on campus this year, we suspect that this late breeding is a sign of earlier failures. The wettest June on record cannot have helped.

At least two female squirrels in Park Village were still pregnant on American Independence Day (4 July). If all goes well they will care for their young for the rest of the vacation.
LETTERS

Debate continues on the 84/86 bus

It is not the bus company's decision to stop the 84 and 86 bus routes [Bulletin 15 June] but has happened as a direct result of the University withdrawing its funding.

Those of us who use the current routes have never been consulted about the threat to these routes and what stopping them might mean for us.

The response from Chris Wadley that it will add only another 40 minutes to your journey time is plain insulting. Suggestion about car sharing are unhelpful if you don't own a car.

We also would like to know exactly how the University knows that the new route will be used by more. When one, including the bus company, does not yet know where the route will go - so can actually have no idea as to how many people might actually use it?

Lisa Patel + 110 others

Chris Wadley, Transport Manager, replies:

The University has subsidised the 8/46 bus service for the past four years, along with Brighton & Hove City Council.

However, after a survey at the start of the autumn term 2006 showed a very small number of users of the service from the University, we decided to withdraw our funding in order to make better use of it elsewhere.

We have identified various areas that aren't currently served by a transport system and are in greater need of a bus service. The new service will be decided upon once a survey has been completed and will increase the number of staff and students commuting to campus by bus.

Brighton & Hove bus company have decided that without our funding they will not be able to run the 84/86 service for a small group of people, so they have decided to stop it in September. The information that journey times for these passengers could be up to 40 minutes extra came from the bus company.

The option of car sharing - when two or more people share a car and travel together - does not require each person to own a car; the aim is to match people travelling from a particular location. To sign up, visit www.universitycashare.com.

Retail in Bramber House

I was amazed to see that the convenience store had gone when I went over to the refectory today. Were there any discussions or protests?

More disturbing, I hear that the Post Office may go as well? Will there be any discussions about this? I do hope so!

Mick Henry, Chemistry

Charles Dudley, who is responsible for trading services, replies:

The current tenant of the Mace store in Bramber House wanted to renew the lease for an extended period.

We could not agree to this since that would stand in the way of future development of the ground floor of Bramber House to improve our food and retail services.

The tenant was legally represented throughout discussions and accepted the terms offered by the University in relation to the non-renewal of the lease. The store closed on 29 June.

The University is now looking at the best short-term use of the space for the benefit of staff and students.

No decisions have yet been made about short- or long-term use and surveys of students and staff are a key part of the development of the catering and retail strategy.

With regard to the Post Office, there is no truth in this rumour and it will not be going.

Union president says thanks to staff

A little letter to show our appreciation towards all those staff and faculty with whom we have worked so intensely over the past year.

Great progress has been made on issues of equality and diversity, trade union solidarity, widening participation, teaching and learning resources, international student issues and of course the role universities have to play in the fight against global warming. None of this would have been possible without the support of so many admirable, but too often undervalued, staff and faculty.

SUSSEX students have proved themselves to be a passionate bunch, whether on the sports pitch, as members of societies, volunteering, writing for Union media or just enjoying some good nights out.

One year is never enough to achieve all you hope to - we have been forging great relationships with the incoming sabbatics, who we are certain will carry the progressive torch into the coming year and keep 'the powers that be' on their toes about delivering a forward-thinking, driven and comprehensive education that Sussex must be proud of.

Dan Glass, outgoing SUSU President

Small ads

To let: 1-bed furnished flat in Fircroft. Access to large garden. £200 pnm incl. Low rent in return for assistance to elderly literary lady (flexible arrangement). Suit independent, creative single. E: a.r.wilson@courthouse.co.uk.


For sale: Pink flip-top mobile camera phone, Sagem MYCS-3. Used for 1 week only. £40. C: T: 07765 916406.

To let: 3-bed furnished house in Woodingdean. Gas CH, double glazing, new flooring. T: 07904 497907.

Wanted: Cheap typing. T: 01825 767240.

For sale: Leather footstool: £10; IKEA chair: £5. T: 01825 767240.

For sale: Baby stuff, car, household appliances. Leaving early Aug. Contact Antonio or telta: E: a2950@sussex.ac.uk, T: 08701 471709 or 07969 134162.

For sale: Saab 93 turbo automatic, 1999, Green, leather seats. £2k ono. E: j.hanwell@sussex.ac.uk, ext 2746.

News in brief

Memorial for Shimon Awerbuch

A memorial event is to be held in September for Dr Shimon Awerbuch, Senior Fellow in SPRU, who tragically died with his family in a plane crash in February. The memorial will be held on Wednesday 5 September at 11.30am in the Meeting House, followed by an informal lunch in the Freeman Centre at 1pm. All members of the University are welcome to come; if you plan to do so, contact Andy Wilson on ext. 8166, E: a.r.wilson@sussex.ac.uk.

Competition winner

The winner of the latest hotel competition is Angela Bennett, a Finance Assistant in Management Accounts. Angela wins one night's stay in a double room at the five-star De Vere Grand Hotel in Brighton, plus dinner for two and a full English breakfast.

New sabbys take up office

The new elected sabbatical officers in the Students' Union (USU) have taken up their full-time, year-long positions. Daniel Vockins becomes President; Polly Jackson, Finance Officer; Koos Couvé, Communications Officer; Timmy Konar, Welfare Officer; Saul Reid, Education Officer; and Michael Alexander, Activities Officer (again).

Academic event

On Tuesday 17 July, a Centre for Physical Electronics and Quantum Technology seminar will be held at 1pm in Arts A155. Ahmet Aydin (Sussex) will be leading the seminar, entitled 'Application of electric potential sensor technology in NMR signal acquisition'.