

President's Talk 7 December 2013:

CHAIRMAN: Here is our President, Richard Ward, to give his President's Talk.

PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mary.

Welcome, everybody and I hope you enjoyed your Christmas lunch.

Thank you, June, for organising everything so smoothly, as usual.

This year it was suggested that I do something different, unlike the last few years when I have talked about shorthand, we being a shorthand society, so I am.

I was going to use a flipchart and put some symbols on it, but unfortunately, we don't have access to the flipchart. I am, therefore, just going to ask generally, do any of you play a musical instrument?

Several members said they learnt the piano and John said he was in a choir.

Does anyone read music?

Piano players among us admitted to reading music.

PAT: I tried to teach myself the descant recorder and can just about pick out Three Blind Mice! Then I find that the other recorders are tuned to different notes!

PRESIDENT: The reason why I asked this is because I found that a lot of the fast stenographers have previously played piano in the past and it helps with the chording action on the stenograph machine. I also wondered whether, with us being relating to symbols quite easily through shorthand - so there is a link to shorthand, in a way - whether people were good at picking up symbols from other things as well, such as music.

The reason why I am saying all this is as part of my other subjects that I practise and study I have been learning the violin and the piano over the last couple of years and I belong to something called ELLSO which is East London Late Starters Orchestra.

<http://www.ellso.org/>

Anybody can join and you don't have to have learnt a musical instrument, they will teach you and it is purely string instruments, so violin, viola, cello, or double bass, if anybody wants to carry a double bass around with them.

I had wanted to learn the violin from a very young age, but at school they wouldn't get a violin tutor in just for myself. I thought it was my great great grandfather who used to play in the Manchester Philharmonic Orchestra, but I recently found out that it was actually my grandfather that used to play, so I thought: Oh, now here's my incentive. I decided to learn piano and violin over the last couple of years. The violins are not as expensive as I thought. You can get a standard one for about £120, or even less than that.

MARY: The Chinese imports are quite cheap.

PRESIDENT: You can get them for about £70.

MARY: On the other hand, we bought my daughter a 100 year old German one for £300!

PRESIDENT: They do vary, but you can actually hire them.

As far as the piano is concerned, I am learning that at the City Lit which is an adult education college based near Holborn. They do lots of lovely courses for different things from dance, art, history, languages, including Latin and Greek. A very good place if you are wanting something to fill some of your time.

<http://www.citylit.ac.uk/>

As far as cost is concerned, it varies. The beginners course for piano was 10 weeks, an introduction course, I think it was about £150, but there are concession rates as well. For the whole year, when you are into your grades - I am on Level 2 now - I think it is about £450. The violin, at ELLSO, again, there are concessionary rates. For a 10-week course it is £150, but for that it is three and a half hours a day on the Saturday. We start at 9:30 and finish at 1:30 and within that it encompasses technique, such as knowing how to hold your violin, play different scales, different ranges, and so on. Musicianship, how to read music, understand rhythm and techniques as well as two different ensembles.

The age group varies. At the ELLSO the youngest is 18 with the majority in their 40s and 50s, but the eldest at the moment, I believe, is about 85.

JOHN: Somebody of 85 is learning an instrument from scratch at that age?

PRESIDENT: Yes.

We meet on a Saturday morning. Sorry, it sounds as though I am plugging here! Within 10 weeks we learn about four or five pieces of music and then we do a concert. Last week we just completed our concert and I have some music that we did. Bear in mind that most of us are beginners, so I am just going to play you samples- you might decide to run out of the room at this point - of one or two pieces. Some you may recognise, but one you may not. See if you recognise this and I hope we have some volume on here, if I can get this to work.

1st music

MARY: That's the Blue Danube. That is after 10 weeks' tuition?

PRESIDENT: Yes. IRIS: That's not bad.

PRESIDENT: In that, I was playing the main tune. I was classed as a first violinist. I have literally had two years' of tuition and I was playing the main tune on that one.

Then there are other people that have just come in and they were playing the background, the dum-dum-dum-de-dum part of it.

This one you might recognise. I am actually playing the second violin which means that I am not playing the main tune.

2nd music

That one was Bad Romance by Lady Gaga!

(Laughter)

So, a bit more modern.

Then about four weeks ago it was ELLSO's 30-year anniversary. I didn't go to the party, but apparently those that did were given a piece of music and then, the following week, we were all told that we were all going to play this piece of music at the concert, so we literally had two weeks to learn it. It was a piece specially commissioned by James Hesford.

The piece is called Leytonstone Mosaics and it is supposed to be collaboration of different themes based on Alfred Hitchcock because, apparently, Hitchcock came from Leytonstone originally.

JOHN: Did he? Didn't he do well! From there to Hollywood and Beverly Hills.

PRESIDENT; This is just a small piece and hopefully you will understand some of the Hitchcock themes.

Third music

MARY: Yes, it did sound a bit Hitchcockian!

PRESIDENT; That we had to learn in two weeks, so it was full-on, the full ensemble. Everybody from all the different stages playing in that piece.

JOHN: How many are there of you altogether, if you are all there?

PRESIDENT: If we are all there, going on for about 100. Based on what I see from the orchestra generally, there are probably about 30 - 40 Grade I to II violinists and cellos. There are quite a lot of cellos in the orchestra. There are four double bass and lots more in the higher levels.

MARY: Were you playing in there?

PRESIDENT; I was playing the violin, yes.

MARY: Could you actually pick yourself out there?

PRESIDENT: Probably the one playing the wrong note!

(Laughter)

I was playing the second violin.

I was trying to relate it to symbols and whether people who learned shorthand were actually involved in music as well and whether there was a connection there. The majority of you seem to have some past experience on reading other forms of symbols.

JOHN: Are a lot of these people shorthand writers?

PRESIDENT: I don't know that. I haven't checked that one out. I know there are a lot of teachers there. I found that out.

JOHN: Shorthand teachers?

PRESIDENT: No. One is a history teacher, one a junior teacher. The other thing is that aged 80+ learning a new instrument, that's quite a good feat as well.

EILEEN: They say that music is connected to people who have mathematic expertise. Shorthand, I would think, is probably connected with languages. That part of your brain that associates with languages.

I just want to wish you all a merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much.

(Applause)