

ICSE Tour Report: Canterbury Weekend Away Spring 2010

On Friday the 19th of March began the first ever ICSE Weekend Away for over two years. As soon as the rehearsal was over, fourteen of the most intrepid members of the String Ensemble started frantically packing a minibus and John Sandall's car with instruments, music stands and luggage. In the capable hands of our driver (and also the leader of the ensemble) Jon Silver, we reached the YHA hostel in Canterbury at about 11.30. We whiled away the rest of the evening with a quiet game of Cranium, which had many amusing moments, as well as several quite disturbing ones.

Breakfast was at 8.00 in the morning, and we saw various different interpretations of that particular instruction as ICSE members wandered into the dining room anywhere up to two minutes before we had to leave. The "early" start was a sign of things to come, as it would be a pretty intense weekend. We immediately jumped back on the minibus and set off towards our concert venue - Abbeyfield Connors House residential home, where we were welcomed by the manager of the tour, Nicola Jee, and a fat dozy rabbit.

We quickly settled into our rehearsal room, and began the first of three intense rehearsals. Our repertoire was the music we were planning to perform that term: Mendelssohn's *String Symphony no. 8*, Stravinsky's extremely challenging *Concerto in D*, Barber's powerful *Adagio for Strings* and *Stop Playing Homework and do your Video Games* by some guy on the internet. This was our first look at the video games piece, which was a collection of classic (and mostly Nintendo) video games ranging from Tetris to Zelda, arranged for strings. It was a pleasant change from the more conventional repertoire, and for those of us who know and love those games, was a great blast from the past. Although having only been with the ensemble for a term and a



half, our new conductor Scott Wilson already knew how to get the most out of the group, and it was a productive, if slightly sleepy, rehearsal. Naturally there were tea breaks to keep us all happy.

Just after lunch we had our first chance to explore the city properly. We were a short walk from the cathedral, which is where the more cultured among us made our way to. Armed with a guide of the cathedral, we made a vague attempt to follow the route marked on the plan, but sadly were unable to explore the whole place when several areas were suddenly and inexplicably roped off. What we did manage to see ranged from the spectacularly massive stained glass windows to the huge collection of crucifixes and chalices, which were both breathtaking and at the same time rather eerie. To complete our afternoon of culture, we

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headed off in the general direction of the castle, under the guidance of Ingolf's map reading skills. As far as I gather, the rest of the ensemble spent their free time in a teashop, leisurely making their way through cream tea.

Eventually it was time to make our way back to the residential home to resume our rehearsal. Focusing on the Stravinsky – easily the hardest of the pieces – made it a tough rehearsal, but ICSE people are made of stern stuff, and we made great



progress that afternoon. When we got back to the hostel, many of us were seriously ready for some food... and soon we had it: massive amounts of pasta, cooked by Toby and the ladies of the ICSE committee. There was enough for at least five helpings each.

The next important thing was to find a suitable establishment to spend the evening at. After spending quite some time wandering around looking for the best pub in Canterbury, we finally settled down to sampling some of the more interesting looking local ales, and generally recovering from what had been a long and strenuous day. The traditional sectional shots were held at various stages throughout the evening, starting with the classic "cello shots", and later on moving on to some of John's more dubious drinking ideas. All too soon it was time to leave, but a couple of cellists managed to get themselves locked inside the pub, due to being in the toilets while it was closing. We stumbled our way back to the hostel, some of us looking forward to the morning less than others.

Sure enough, breakfast was an interesting time for some members of the ensemble, although everyone was fully recovered in time for the early morning rehearsal, where finishing touches were put to the pieces, to prepare for the concert that would follow in the afternoon. As soon as it was over, we immediately moved off to another pub, this time for lunch. The return to the residential home was quite a rush, since we had waited a while for food at the pub, but we quickly set up stands in another one of the rooms, and changed into our typically sombre concert dress.

The concert was casual, but well-received, although I'm not sure if many of the elderly residents fully appreciated the video games piece. We played one movement of the Stravinsky, the video games piece, and two movements of the Mendelssohn, which went down very well. It was a solid performance, and it was particularly satisfying to see the results of the intensive rehearsals paying off so soon. As soon as it was over, we packed everything into the minibus again, and set off towards London.

The main purpose of our tour to Canterbury was to have a series of rehearsals followed by a concert in Kent. One of ICSE's aims is to provide opportunities to its members to widen their

musical experience and improve the standard of its members' playing. The intensive schedule of rehearsals followed by a concert allowed players to learn much about playing as an ensemble as well as about their own playing, and gave us extra rehearsal time to prepare for events such as ArtsFest. Spending this amount of concentrated time together allowed our members to bond quickly, which is particularly important as we are a traditionally close-knit ensemble.

The tour was certainly a success in terms of the aims and objectives originally set out, since we did indeed have an intensive series of rehearsals, followed by a concert. Two of the pieces rehearsed were also performed at Artsfest, which was the week after we returned. Feedback from members was all positive, though a couple of issues were raised. It was mentioned that the tour was quite expensive, at £45 for a weekend away, but that this compares favourably with other musical weekend trips. It was also pointed out that the majority of the members on tour were not new to ICSE, which made it seem like an "in crowd". This could probably be improved on by reducing the price, however the real issue is getting new people involved more, which is a general aim for ICSE. Another problem could be that the scheduling of the dates was inconvenient for some people, but that would always be a problem.

With 10 full members out of the 14 attendees (including our conductor, whom we did not charge), we gained £585 ticket income for the trip. With the Union subsidising the travel costs by £162.49 and the addition of £200 ICSE subsidy, we were able to break roughly even on the trip with an expenditure of around £920.

This was our first of what will hopefully be many tours with our new conductor, and everyone involved had a great time. After the success of our last few tours in the UK, we hope to expand our horizons by touring on the continent this summer.

Ken Harvey
ICSE Publicity Officer 09/10