

Lennox Berkeley Society Newsletter

Issue 8

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25 Years of the Lennox Berkeley Society!

In September 2000, the Lennox Berkeley Society held its first meeting in the London home of Lady Freda Berkeley, chaired by our co-founder Jim Nichol.

A quarter of a century later, it's a real pleasure to see what the Society has become. As I described in the last Newsletter, we provide an outstanding online resource of information that's used by musicians and enthusiasts across the world. We have sponsored recordings of Berkeley's music, with John Wilson's recent recording of the *Divertimento in B♭* achieving world-class quality. We regularly provide financial support for live performances too, and our newly typeset orchestral parts for the *Divertimento* will be a very long-term practical aid for performers.

Meanwhile, new members continue to join the Society, bringing financial support for our ongoing work, and bringing friendly faces to our Annual General Meetings. One recent addition is John Mark Rose, a pianist who has toured northern Britain performing Berkeley's *Six Preludes*, *Five Short Pieces* and *Mazurka*.

All in all, the Society has achieved a lot in those 25 years, and – speaking as a relatively new member of the Committee – I'd like to mark our thanks to those who had the vision and the industry to make it all happen, and our members who've supported the Society along the way!

Best of all, we're not stopping...



Divertimento returning to Cambridge

Those new orchestral parts for the *Divertimento* are coming in handy, as Adam, our Chairman, is conducting his Academy of Great St Mary's in this work on Saturday 27th September, in Cambridge's University Church.

I play in that orchestra myself, as a violinist, and I can testify first-hand that the new parts are a massive improvement over the edition that we used for a performance in 2018. Back then, rehearsals were continually interrupted as players had to ask Adam what the notes and other markings were supposed to be.

Now there's no ambiguity whatsoever; we can see exactly what to play, the page breaks are positioned considerably, and the rehearsal marks and bar numbers make navigation trivially easy. This just leaves us with the little matter of playing all the notes in tune and with the correct rhythms... suffice it to say that, at the time of writing, further study is required!

Our concert is supported by the Society, as the cost of hiring the Berkeley orchestral parts is being covered by a grant, for which we are very grateful. (Adam, Dinah and I naturally recused ourselves from this vote to avoid any conflict of interest.)

Indirectly, our concert has an additional link to the recent *Divertimento* recording by John Wilson and the Sinfonia of London. One of the front desk violinists in that recording was Charlie Lovell-Jones, a Grammy nominee, who now leads the Sinfonia himself. Charlie is coming to Cambridge to perform Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto* with us. Also featuring the *Divertimento* and works by Mozart and Beethoven, it's shaping up to be a spectacular event.

Adam has also been working with Charlie, John Wilson and the Sinfonia on a recording of his *Symphony No. 4*. More about that soon...

More Berkeley performances

The Society is supporting a project by the Berkeley Ensemble, for whom composers Richard Sissons and our own Paul Cott have produced a new arrangement of Berkeley's *Five Songs (Walter de la Mare)*, op. 26. Originally written for medium voice and piano, this arrangement is for voice accompanied by string quartet, flute, clarinet and harp.

This new arrangement was first performed at a Luton Music event in St Mary's Church, Luton, alongside Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro*, as well as works by Debussy, Bartók and Berio.

Lennox Berkeley was a frequent visitor of the Luton Music Club, of which Michael Berkeley is a Vice President to this day; the family name appears continually throughout the Club's recorded history: <https://www.lutonmusic.org.uk/about/>

The Committee is also in contact with our former Chairman, David Wordsworth, about plans to perform Berkeley's *Stabat Mater* in Praga Cathedral, Warsaw.

Warsaw may be out of range for most of our readers, so here's a more accessible performance – only a YouTube visit away! Yuko Sano, the pianist who performed at our AGM in the summer, performs Berkeley's *Toccata* live in the Holywell Music Room, Oxford:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9bUdlj-N-g>



Letters to Roger Butler and Berkeley's Nocturnes

One friend of Lennox and Freda Berkeley was Roger Butler, the first man to come out – voluntarily and under his own name – in the British national media, an astonishingly brave act in 1960, when homosexual activity remained illegal. Berkeley's correspondence with Butler has come to light, following the publication of a book about Butler: *The Light of Day*, by Christopher Stephens and Louise Radnofsky.

The letters include illuminating comments by Lennox Berkeley about his compositions, notably *Voices of the Night* and the *Oboe Quartet*, along with a charming account by Freda about an event in Monte Carlo with Nadia Boulanger. Tony's news article about the letters may be found on our website:

<https://www.lennoxberkeley.org.uk/news>



I was struck by the similarities between Berkeley's description of *Voices of the Night* – "a Nocturne in which I made no attempt to reproduce actual night noises such as the hooting of owls or the squeaking of ghosts, but rather to produce a nocturnal atmosphere" – and the Nocturne movement of the *Divertimento*.

Between the ominous growl of the lower strings, the distant muted trumpet, and the piercing power of the movement's climactic passage, this *Divertimento* movement presents another example of Berkeley's outstanding ability to produce a nocturnal atmosphere – in this case, one of haunting unease that calls to mind the terrifying era in which it was commissioned.

Richard Hickox's evocative recording of *Voices of the Night* may be heard online:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0P-OgEL20GE>

Adam Pounds: *Symphony No. 4*

As I mentioned briefly above, Adam's *Symphony No. 4* has been recorded by John Wilson and the Sinfonia of London, led by Charlie Lovell-Jones. This follows the critical success of Adam's 3rd symphony that the Sinfonia released alongside Berkeley's *Divertimento*. The recording (depicted below) took place in St Augustine's Church, Kilburn, earlier this month.

Symphony No. 4 is a much more involved work than the 3rd, using more brass and percussion, and calling for a larger string section. Adam revised it extensively, following its concert premiere by his Academy of Great St Mary's in December 2024, even revising the order of the inner movements.

The orchestra remembered Adam's previous work, and showed their enthusiasm for his music with a spontaneous ovation. When socialising with the players after the recording sessions, Adam found them to be very interested in Berkeley too, as Adam's teacher, so Adam seized the opportunity to discuss the man and his teaching.

In particular, Jon Aassgaard, the Sinfonia's lead cellist who has played for 25 years with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, spoke of how much he enjoyed recording Berkeley's music, especially the *Serenade*, which appears in the Sinfonia's 2021 album of English string music. The Society had made a grant towards that *Serenade* recording too, and it was through that correspondence that Adam made contact with John Wilson, who has endorsed and promoted Adam's work ever since.

Once the recording was complete, Adam recounts taking his daughter for a nostalgic visit:

"On the Sunday morning Dinah, Fiona and I took a walk to Little Venice, and I was able to show Fiona where I went for lessons. It seemed like only yesterday, and gave me a warm glow. One of the most important things that Lennox imparted was self-belief. I will always owe him a debt of gratitude."



Until next time, I'll leave you with some words from Jack Gibbons, a composer and pianist on whom Berkeley made a strong impression. Writing on social media about Ravel's visit to Oxford, Gibbons shared a particularly touching memory about Berkeley.

Thank you as always for reading.

Ash Bridges (Editor)



Adam Pounds with John Wilson (left) and the Sinfonia of London, at the recording of his Symphony No. 4.

Ravel visited Oxford in person in 1928... In the first [picture] he is in the Doctor of Music robes, standing in front of the Sheldonian Theatre, having just been awarded an honorary D.Mus by Oxford University. In the second picture he is standing with the English composer Lennox Berkeley, who would become a friend and pupil of Ravel.



This picture is very close to home for me, as it was Lennox Berkeley who gave me my first encouragement as a young composer when he awarded me a composition prize at a competition in Oxford in 1976 (when I was just 14) for a piano work I had written. I still vividly remember Lennox Berkeley's enthusiasm for my piece, and it was a huge boost to my confidence to have such a distinguished musician showing faith in my work. Alas no photograph was taken of the two of us together that day, but I love the picture of Lennox Berkeley with Ravel in 1928, and clearly Ravel was offering Lennox Berkeley the same encouragement that Lennox Berkeley gave me almost 50 years later: in the photograph Ravel is looking through one of Lennox's scores and they are clearly sharing some warmth and humour.

Jack Gibbons, 2025