

Geoffrey Argent

Blake's 70

Howard Blake hits 70 this October, and to celebrate he will conduct the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in a programme of his concert works at Cadogan Hall on the big day, 28 October. There are also two CD releases coming; the first, on Naxos, includes the world premiere recording of his violin sonata (dedicated to Miles Baster), performed by Madeleine Mitchell; the second, on Sony BMG, includes the re-release of his piano concerto. *The Snowman Stage Show* will return to Sadler's Wells for its 11th consecutive Christmas season.

Blake's output includes more than 600 opus numbers, comprising music for the stage, concert hall and more than 60 scores for film and tv. He has made a living solely from writing music since 1966.

'I was discouraged as a student – I didn't really see myself as being able to write music, so from 1960 to 1970 I wrote commercial music, and I was successful. But I found I couldn't live just writing music other people demanded, I wanted something more. In 1970 I dropped out of London life and went and sat on a beach in Cornwall and decided I wanted to find my own voice.'

Career highlights since then, he says, have included the 1986 premiere of his *Benedictus* at St Albans Cathedral, given by Robert Tear with the English Chamber Orchestra and massive choral forces, and performing his piano concerto with the Philharmonia Orchestra in 1991.

'In a way, I think I started a trend towards writing religious works which had a broader outlook,' he says. 'Something I have said before is that I believe that all great music evolves firstly from critical assimilation of available tradition and secondly by attention to current innovations of the day. I don't believe that as a composer one should be in an ivory tower.'

Of the recent performances of his work, one in particular stands out: 'At the academy I studied with Howard Folkstone, and a very odd thing happened. I thought he was a terrific teacher, but he suddenly said "I can't go on teaching you, I'm giving up writing". It was very traumatic, I had just written what I thought was a very good piece at the time, my variations on a theme of Bartók, and I thought he was pleased with it. The work has never been performed until this July, when the wonderful Russian pianist Nadia Giliova played it at the Wigmore Hall.'

The birthday concert begins at 7.30pm and will include *The Snowman*, the piano concerto, performed by William Chen, and the London premiere of his dramatic oratorio, *The Passion of Mary*. Tickets cost £10 to £35.

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Medici musician returns to UK

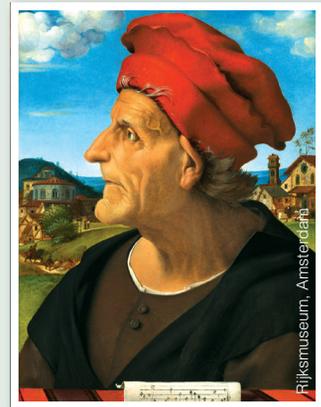
A forthcoming exhibition at the National Gallery which will explore the dramatic rise of portraiture in the renaissance, *Renaissance Faces: Van Eyck to Titian*, will feature one of the earliest-known Italian portraits of a professional musician. It has not been seen in the UK since 1930.

The sitter, Francesco Giamberti da Sangallo, was born in about 1404 and died in or shortly before October 1482. The portrait is posthumous, painted by Piero di Cosimo from a death mask.

Giamberti was on the payroll of Cosimo de' Medici as both an architect and a musician. In the background of the portrait references to both these

disciplines are balanced; on the left is a village dominated by a circular structure behind which is a palace, in which some of the characteristics of his son's architectural style seem to be evoked; On the left an open-air mass is being sung, the organ being played by a man wearing a red hat similar to that worn by Giamberti.

The exhibition will feature portraits by Raphael, Titian, Botticelli, Van Eyck, Holbein, and Dürer. It runs from 15 October until 18 January next year. Full-price tickets cost £10, senior and concession tickets are £9 or £5 on Tuesday afternoons.



Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Piero di Cosimo (1462–1522)
Francesco Giamberti da Sangallo,
musician, about 1485

Draw your own score for Exaudi

All-comers will be encouraged to make 'large-scale abstract drawings that will form the basis for a vast graphic score' for performance by vocal ensemble Exaudi at the Wellcome Trust Gibbs Building in London on 27 September. The event takes place from 11am to 5pm, and is part of The Big Draw 2008, a free three-day artistic bonanza organized by the Campaign for Drawing which does for drawing what the Beethoven Fest Bonn does for Beethoven and Bonn.

Artist Sam Belinfante, composer Neil Luck and Exaudi will help participants to create a new work for choir. As the drawings develop, Exaudi will work with them and the workshop leaders to 'transform these objects into music' and 'interpret the various marks and gestures as sound, through a wide range of vocal techniques.'

Everyone is invited to compose and sing during a full day of workshops leading up to the public premiere of the new work, to be called *Rhizome for Choir* at 4.45pm.

Running in parallel with this on 27 September will be a demonstration of Belinfante's 'Drawing Machine', by which members of the public will make abstract drawings by beating drumsticks on mechanically scrolling paper. The drawings will then be 'performed' by musicians and members of the public by interpreting them as musical scores.

The project takes place at University College, London.

In several sessions during the evening of 26 September illustrator Steven Appleby will draw response to the live music of beatboxer Nathan 'Flutebox' Lee. For more details of this and all the other events visit www.thebigdraw.org.



RNCM £2m legacy to benefit students

The RNCM has received an unexpected legacy of nearly £2m. John Alan Fewkes, who had no link with the college apart from a friendship with a former company secretary, died on 16 April 2007 leaving 90% of his estate to the conservatoire. The terms of the will dictate that the money be used to help British-born students in the School of Wind, Brass and Percussion and, accordingly, the college has founded the John Fewkes Leicestershire Instrumentalist Scholarships. The interest from the money will provide scholarships for up to 15 students a year.

RNCM principal Professor Jonty Stockdale expressed 'disbelief but joy' at the news, saying, 'Students and their families already make substantial sacrifices to pursue and enable training for a career in music, and these scholarships will provide much needed financial support to assist with the contribution to fees and the purchase and upkeep of musical instruments.'

Mr Fewkes lived in Leicestershire and jointly owned a school outfitters manufacturing company. He is said to have been passionate about music despite having been discouraged from studying it while at school. He took up piano and saxophone lessons when he retired and went on to run a dance band.

His brother, Roger Fewkes, said, 'John did not attend a music college to further his love of music and it was not until he had retired that he learned to play the saxophone and later the keyboard. He had no direct family descendants to whom he could bequeath his estate, in these circumstances he determined that his bequest to the college should be used for the benefit of English-born students to enjoy, study and play music to the highest standards.'



We realise that our endorsement of popcorn as an accompaniment to opera may not catch on in theatres (see **cinema tickets** competition, last issue: there is still time) – apparently in the good old days, if you bought sweets at Opera North's Grand Theatre, for fear of unseemly noise the staff used to unwrap every one and put them in a paper bag before handing them over. We got to thinking how closely entwined are the worlds of music and food. Presumably ever since people recreationally stretched their leftovers over the bits of wood they were eating off there has been a link. One discerning clergyman during the enlightenment said that heaven was the sound of 'eating paté de foie gras to the sound of trumpets'. Not the sound of moaning virgins, vanquished infidels or the cadences of the spoken mass, mind, but actual brass instruments.

Many great singers have had a weakness for the pies, and we have heard singing teachers with our own ears endorsing fat as a backdoor route to a natural support and superior sounding vocal chords. Some said that the slimline Maria Callas lost something after she shed the pounds. Deborah Voigt, having lost 100 of them following gastric bypass surgery, said that her singing is no longer 'as effortless'. Some have been cruelly consumed by their appetites, like Mario Lanza, who drank champagne like water. On the other side of the pros arch, we won't go so far as to say that English audiences are dead until they get a wee dram inside them, but anyone who has been to Garsington or Glyndebourne or, indeed, taken a hip flask to a cinecast, can attest to a certain synergy. Anyway, here are the **Barlines top five opera-related foods**.

1. Tournedos Rossini. No contest, Barlines' all-time number one greatest musical gourmand happening is also our second-favourite bel canto composer. Place a seared fillet steak on a fried crouton, cover with foie gras and truffles then dress with demi-glace sauce and madeira. Apparently the recipe was the composer's own, and it was he who gave it to Adolphe Dugléré, chef at the Café Anglais in Paris, a man Rossini later dubbed *Le Mozart de la cuisine*. In *Larousse Gastronomique*, you

Strad cello on block

Tarisio Auctions will present the 'Amaryllis Fleming' Stradivari cello as the star lot in its autumn sale of fine instruments and bows.

Made in Cremona in 1717, it is one of only around 60 surviving Stradivari cellos. This example, which dates from Stradivari's 'golden period', is the first to come up for auction in almost ten years. It carries an estimate of £900,000-£1,200,000 and is expected to break the world record for a cello sold at auction.

The cello is being sold in association with London violin dealership J&A Beare Ltd. The firm's expert, Charles Beare, described it as 'originally one of Stradivari's greatest'. It was made on the B-form pattern, using a distinctive maple for the back and ribs, which are in an exceptionally fine state of preservation. The front and scroll, although not original, were made of fine materials in the mid 18th century by the Spanish luthier José Contreras.

The instrument bears the name of the British cellist Amaryllis Fleming (1925-1999), who bought it in the 1950s. Daughter of the artist Augustus John and half-sister of James Bond author Ian Fleming, she was taught by Pierre Fournier and became one of UK's top-rank cellists, particularly admired for her performances of Bach. The cello is being sold by her family to benefit the Royal College of Music in London, where she studied and later taught.

Julian Lloyd Webber is to play the cello on 21 July at St James' Palace in London at a concert dedicated to Amaryllis Fleming and hosted by the Prince of Wales. It will also be played by Natalie Clein at a recital in September. It will be available to view on 6 and 7 October at the Kempinski Courthouse Hotel on Great Marlborough Street, London, as well as by appointment at J&A Beare on Queen Anne Street. Further viewings are to be held in Cremona, New York and Boston. The cello travels insured for £1,400,000.

The auction, which is held online at www.tarisio.com, ends on 31 October 2008.



JA Beare

will find entries for omelette Rossini, scrambled eggs Rossini, soft-boiled eggs Rossini and roast chicken Rossini, all of which involve smothering the principal ingredient with foie gras, truffles and demi-glace. The encyclopedia also credits the composer with inventing a way of stuffing macaroni with foie gras by means of a silver syringe. The story goes that Rossini once said that he only cried three times in his life: when his first opera was booed, when he first heard Paganini play the violin, and when he dropped a truffled turkey in a lake whilst picnicking.

2. Georges-Auguste Escoffier's creations in the Savoy kitchens in honour of Dame Nellie Melba are well known – serve your peaches on a bed of vanilla ice cream and add raspberry purée (although originally spun sugar was used instead) and you have Peach Melba. Make your toast thin, dry and crispy and ditto. The three-octave diva once had a serious food-related sense of humour failure when Enrico Caruso, clasping her tiny hand under the table, during a performance of *Bohème*, in order to pronounce it frozen, pressed a hot sausage into it. The offending piece of meat was hurled across the stage in disgust.

3. Bizet's Omelette. A brilliant spoof of stilted bel canto ensemble writing, the *Omelette* quartet is from the composer's early opera *Dr Miracle*. Written when he was 19, for a competition organised by Offenbach, it has long outlived the other 70-odd contenders.

4. Spaghetti alla Caruso. A great commercial ambassador for Neapolitan food to New York, the tenor had a particular fondness of chicken livers. Recipes for the sauce vary, but you can't go far wrong if you fry some mushrooms in butter with some onions and garlic, deglaze it with a glass of wine, turn the livers in some seasoned flour and sautee separately while the wine reduces, then add around a tin of tomatoes with some tomato puree before adding the livers. Season and garnish with parsley.

5. JD Wetherspoons' Chicken Korma. Most of the standard venues for small touring opera companies have a J D Wetherspoon round the corner. Forget the idea of not eating before a show, from our own experience most of the singers and pretty much all the band will be in there about an hour and a half before curtain-up