

BIDEFORD MUSIC CLUB

Spring 2025 NEWSLETTER.

Dear Music Lovers.

We have just had two wonderful concerts on Sunday afternoons, which have been well attended and enjoyed by many of you.

Regular attendees will recall Lucy Nolan on harp and Meera Maharaj on flute magnificently kicking off last year's concerts with their enchanting Hathor Duo programme. So we were delighted to warmly welcome Lucy's return to start this year's concerts too and were treated to a splendid January afternoon programme, from the romantic to the contemporary and from the whimsical to the tango! Her wonderfully varied performance specifically included 19th. and 20th. Century composers who wrote pieces dedicated for the harp, with the notable exception of Debussy's Claire de Lune, the arrangement of which was so fitting it might have been written for the harp. We also witnessed a very smoothly replaced broken string on her pedal harp, and hearing Catriona McKay's Kronos Reel played on the smaller Scottish harp, the clarasch. Musical excellence, enjoyment and education all in one afternoon!



"The Committee is grateful to those attendees at January's concert who completed a simple questionnaire. The purpose was to gain attendees' views on the Club's offer, to help guide future planning and bring even more of the artists and instruments you wish to hear. We will be considering some of the takeaways from the questionnaires next month but thought it would be useful to share with you a few insights in the interim.

37 of 60 questionnaires were completed. The number is probably statistically marginal but nonetheless instructive. The overriding messages are 'more of the same' but 'consider a few tweaks'.

31 email addresses were given to add to our Newsletter distribution so some of you may be receiving this electronically for the first time!

27 (73%) of 37 were not members (ie had not purchased a 4 or 6 concert subscription this season). This appears consistent with observations on the door

that, while more people are attending the concerts this season than last, they are doing so for a few individual concerts rather than as a member for 4 or more concerts. This has prompted the Committee to consider, over the coming months, possibly making membership definitions more inclusive and therefore more representative of today's audiences. The Committee may bring a Club Constitution amendment proposal to the AGM in June for wider consideration.

Nearly half of those who were not members heard about the concert from friends. As ever, word of mouth is really powerful and so as we aspire to increase audience attendance, do please continue to introduce your friends to the Club by inviting them to concerts. You are evidently our greatest ambassadors!

When asked about future artist and instrument preferences, 12 (39%) of 31 responses felt continued variety of performers, instruments and genres was what they would most enjoy. To such an open-ended question, there were many different responses but more pianists, cellists, small ensembles and the inclusion of specialist instruments and instruments from around the world as a subset of a performance were all popular suggestions. Incidentally, it's worth reading Pam Thompson's piece below on how she works her magic to bring such high quality and diverse artists to our concert seasons.

To the penultimate question regarding what actions could be taken to help improve your concert experience, 54% of the responses were 'broadly content'. Of the remaining responses, suggestions included the consideration of more Winter concerts on Sunday afternoons, additional Summer concerts in the evening, greater use of the microphone and quieter heating (which intermittently comes on during performances). Again, the Committee will give these helpful points further consideration.

Finally, our thanks to the 30% of respondents who volunteered to, for example, contemplate joining the Committee, distribute posters, provide raffle prizes, assist with refreshments, and set up/clear away chairs. We're very grateful and so don't be surprised if one of the Committee gets in touch in the coming weeks!

The questionnaire exercise is of course a snapshot from a particular audience on a particular day. The Committee welcomes feedback and suggestions at any time so do please feel free to approach us or email the Club at bidfordmusicclub.org@gmail.com."

Our February concert saw Ensemble Mirage (clarinet and String trio) play a range and variety of works, some of which were more familiar than others. We thank "The Hub" for sponsoring this concert

Pam Thompson our Artistic Director has put together some notes on how we choose the artists.

ARTISTS FOR OUR CONCERTS – how do we choose – and why?

We much appreciated all the comments many of you offered in our recent questionnaire at the January concert, and it seems useful to explain how and why we make choices from the many thousands of potential musicians in the UK. Finding good musicians is not a problem, and we would hope to continue to offer our audiences excellent professional players and maintain the high standards in our concerts which have been the norm over nearly seven decades.

Basic considerations

In making selections, there are some fundamental considerations: **standards, availability, variety, practicality and affordability.** We could never afford long-established star performers, but we normally manage to find award-winning young professionals, many of whom are supported and subsidised by trusts such as The Countess of Munster Musical Trust, the Tillett Trust and Making Music, though there are strict limits to how many can be subsidised each year. They are often the stars of the future, building their careers.

Availability

Early in their careers, they balance a mixture of recitals, work with orchestras and ensembles, teaching and workshops, alongside learning new repertoire, rehearsals, and practising, and managing all the administration and travel which a professional career demands. Fitting in our concert dates and travelling to a distant place like Bideford can be challenging. It would be good for them and for us if we could join with other societies in the south-west to offer them mini-tours, but in practice it is not easy for our concert dates to align with those of others.

Variety and Practicality

We try as much as possible in each season to offer a variety of solo performers (usually with accompanist) and ensembles, usually with three to five members, bearing in mind that the more performers there are, the higher the fees and greater the travel costs may be. Sunday afternoon concerts are a bit of a challenge for us, as there is not time after church services to move and tune our very good Bechstein piano by 3pm, so a piano on Sunday is out of the question, and we must give musicians time to set up, tune and rehearse in a new acoustic environment. Travel on Sundays is also unreliable, which may mean that they have to arrive on Saturday and stay. On weekdays, it is usually too late after a concert for performers to go home, so they are often fed and watered late in the evening and stay the night with one of us. This is an advantage when it enables them to do a school session the following day, but that is difficult when they have commitments elsewhere that day.

Costs

We pay, as well as a fee (subsidised when possible), reasonable travel expenses, and offer home accommodation and sustenance. Even with subsidies, it is probable that a fee of at least £250 to £450 per person is expected, quite rightly when you consider that one recital of two to three hours in Bideford may take up two days of travel and performance, quite apart from rehearsal and practice in advance – and years of study before that.

All this is taken into account when setting ticket and subscription prices and weighing that against what audiences can or wish to afford. A good audience (unpredictable in winter months) is essential if we are to cover costs. We spend very little that is not necessary on our administration, publicity, programmes and hosting performers, but we must pay for our venue which is a fixed cost and is likely to increase year by year. The price we now charge for 2+ hours is comparable to and often better than costs per hour of other local theatres and festivals. We continue to seek further subsidies and increase our publicity to attract larger audiences.

Feedback very welcome!

That said, we would like to try to offer our audiences what they want, so the questionnaire responses are helpful. Please do not confine yourselves to questionnaire answers; we would love to hear your views and have your comments at any time and will do our best to answer them.

Pam Thompson, Artistic Director

Committee

We have recently co-opted Mavis Dowling on the committee, but there is room for at least one more member, so please do come and speak to us if you are interested.

The committee would also welcome someone who is willing to take on the task of treasurer.

Next concerts: The following two concerts, which wind up our 2024-2025 programme are mid-week concerts starting at 19.30.

Wednesday 12th. March we will welcome cellist Gerard Flotats and pianist Julian Chan to Bideford. Their programme will include: Bach – C major Cello suite, Beethoven – G minor cello sonata, Suk – Ballade and serenade and Chopin's cello sonata.. This concert is sponsored by Making Music.

Wednesday 2nd. April Ewan Millar oboist and Tomos Boyles pianist will be our guests. Their programme will include works by Bach, Mendelssohn, Finzi, Debussy and Coleridge-Taylor. This concert is sponsored by the Tillett Trust.

Subscriptions:

There is a possibility that we will have to increase the cost of tickets for the next season, however, we are offering you the opportunity to buy tickets for the 2025-26 season at this year's prices. To take up this offer, please speak to a member of the committee, either at a concert or the AGM.

AGM: You are all invited to the AGM which is to be held at Hallsanery near Bideford. Date and time to be confirmed.