

# Basil's News

2019

## Welcome to Basil's News

The annual newsletter of the Philip Bates Trust. Visit our website at [www.philipbatestrust.org.uk](http://www.philipbatestrust.org.uk)

## 2019 Message

Welcome friends to the 2019 edition of Basil's News. Twelve months have passed quickly; all of us have had a year full of successes and failures, fun and sadness, enlightenment and frustration, feeling good and feeling under the weather. We see and hear about things all around the world which make us question what is important. We wonder whether people who are supposedly trying to look after us have the right perspective.

We ask, bearing in mind the aims of the Philip Bates Trust, whether people who make decisions about what is a balanced diet for us understand that music and the arts are not just tasty take it or leave it snacks but vitally important parts of the varied staple diet that we need and deserve in the 21st century.

One of the biggest frustrations and worries for the trust is seeing recent applications asking for support to provide basic arts courses in schools, both at primary and secondary level, which should not even be in question. The subjects learned in Ancient Greece were reading, writing, basic maths, music, and physical training. Which ones of those appear to be less important these days?

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# A Touch of Basil 2018



*Devon Brown performs with Heart of England Singers*

For the third year running ATOB returned to Philip's old school, Bishop Vesey's, for another evening of entertainment, a showcase of a variety of musical endeavours and a chance to meet some of the young people Philip Bates Trust has supported recently.

The evening kicked off with the delightful poem *The Golden Dance*, read eloquently by Philip's cousin Kay Bromhead. This was followed by two Rogers and Hammerstein classics performed by Martin's own team Heart of England Singers, *Oh What a Beautiful Morning* and *Younger than Springtime*. New to this year's programme, current youngsters from BVGS Flute Ensemble treated us to a selection of film music arrangements ranging from *Indiana Jones*

to *Harry Potter*. It was a delight to see such enthusiastic playing from this wind group. The regular vocal duo Susan Bates and Stephen Davis were then joined by accomplished oboe player Sarah Saunders to perform six songs from Vaughan Williams' song cycle *Ten Blake Songs* and they were absolutely enchanting.

It is always a pleasure to welcome Georgina Bloomfield and this year she wowed us again with stunning, mature performances of Vaughan Williams' *Pastorale* and a feisty *Spanish Dance* by Manuel de Falla. A return to vocal music gave us the first of two winners of the Ashleyan opera Prize. Samantha Oxborough delivered two sublime arias, full of emotion and character, Handel's *Lascia ch'io Pianga*



and Gounod's *Faites-lui Aveux* were positively charming performances and indeed the evidence of her achievements winning this title.

As is becoming a happy tradition, the Ex Cathedra Academies of Vocal music brought the first half to a close. The younger members captivated us with their rendition of *Sunshine in My Heart* and *Sleep* before the older Girls' Academy displayed their ability to perform with superb tone production and complete commitment to the melodic line in *Maria Walks Amid the*



*Samantha Oxborough*

joying themselves on stage, and in the case of the young Miss Lucy Bates-Gamble barely being able to contain her sheer joy as this performance progressed to tell us how said penguin might behave at tea!



*Kay, Philip's Cousin*

*Thorns* and *Abendgang im Lenz*. The first half was brought to a close with the Children's Academy performing *The Penguin Song* - an absolute pleasure to see a group of young and vibrant children en-

After some welcome refreshment the second half started with a bang as we warmly welcomed Jamie Brown to the stage with his solo performance of *Grenade*, ably accompanying himself on the guitar. Georgia Denham, who won the Philip Bates prize for Composers and Songwriters with her composition *blue* was next, presenting her settings of two poems for voice, viola, piano and harp using a range of timbres to depict an immersive vision of the sea. It then came to Basil's Bunch - could they follow



that? The small group of singers who meet on the day to bring together a variety of popular pieces performed the well-loved *A Million Dreams*, *On My Own* and the classic Ben E King *Stand By Me*.

Another year of successful music-making shared with an appreciative audience. Elise Fairley, another winner of the Ashleyan Opera Prize, indulged the audience with two more operatic arias - this time from Mozart and Dvořák. Like Samantha, earlier in the programme, Elise displayed her expertise in this field with an aria from *The Marriage of Figaro* and Rusalka's *Song to the Moon*. The grand finale of this concert brought us extracts from Martin Bates' own musical *KING* which, through the words of Keith Dennis (present in the audience), tells the story of Martin Luther King. Soloist Devon Brown's voice commanded the audience with his opening proclamation *Do not make me a Black Messiah*, setting the tone for an uplifting performance of four movements ending with the final chorus *We Shall Overcome* - a truly wonderful climax to the evening before the audience were sent on their way singing the joyous *Bring Me Sunshine* and, just like the song suggests, left all feeling the evening had been a celebration bringing fun, sunshine and love!

Until ATOB 2019 .....

*Sarah Dudley*

## Matthew dances in Nutcracker



*Matthew Bates*

Sue, Rachel and I treated our grandchildren Beth and Lucy to see Tchaikovsky's ballet *Nutcracker* at Birmingham Hippodrome performed by Birmingham Royal Ballet. It was a magical experience, inspiring the children to dance themselves after the performance in the theatre lobby! We were unaware that Matthew had been performing as one of the male snowflakes until we later received a Christmas card from him, saying he had been on loan to Birmingham Royal Ballet during his Graduate Year at the Royal Ballet School.

## In Memoriam Terry Probert

Terry Probert sadly passed away in May this year. He was a very caring, loyal and generous supporter of Philip's Trust and could often be seen at Trust events: at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Bishop Vesey's School and at Arden Hall for the annual Quiz Night. His wife, Jan, is also a member of the Heart of England Singers and regularly sings at the Touch of Basil concerts.





# Lady Macbeth of Mtensk

Having seen Birmingham Opera Company's production of Can-dide a few years previously, I was thrilled to have a ticket to see their 2019 production and had high

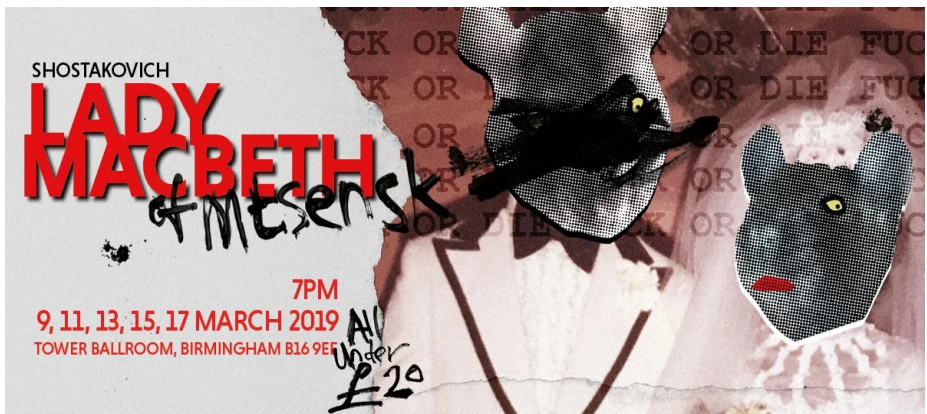



*A Unique Shostakovich Experience*

hopes for an exciting evening. The venue in itself was fascinating - a disused former nightclub: The Tower Ballroom, Edgbaston, Birmingham. The location had been prepared for proceedings and given an edgy feeling, having been 'artfully trashed' by Block9, the company behind Dismaland. Some examples of this

were graffiti, yellowed lighting and bits of scaffolding frame used to create platforms and transport the performers around the venue.

The audience was encouraged to be physically a part of and surrounded by the performance, and to move to wherever the action occurred within the space. This venue offered amazing opportunities for surprising/ satirical production details - for example, the brass section playing from behind the bar and the story being told from a revolving stage which was used at the end to represent the drudge of life and the relentless passage of time. Bodies of extras were laid on the floor to represent almost a post-apocalyptic, broken world. The solo performers were exceptional: most notably, Chrystal E. Williams as Lady Macbeth and Brendan Gunnell as





Seryozha. The CBSO orchestra, directed by Alpesh Chauhan, was absolutely outstanding, as was the production directed by Graham Vick.

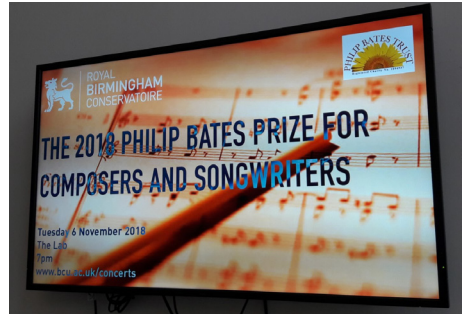
It left you creatively stimulated throughout, speechless and looking around even during breaks to understand the language of venue and production. Props were purposely left around to invite audience interaction - for example, betting tokens / money from a variety of countries which you could pick up and become a part of the performance. Unforgettable.

*Rachel Bates*

## Calling All composers Aged 16 to 25

Entries from all over the UK are now invited for the 2019 Philip Bates Prize for Composers and Songwriters. Composers between the ages of 16 and 25 may submit works in any style by Monday 30th September 2019, this year's application deadline. Shortlisted entries will be given a public performance at the final on Tuesday 26th November, when the winning pieces will be chosen. Shortlisted composers must supply their own pre-rehearsed performers at the final and the chosen winners will receive a cash prize.

This year the rules have been



*Screen in the Adrian Boult Cafe at RBC*

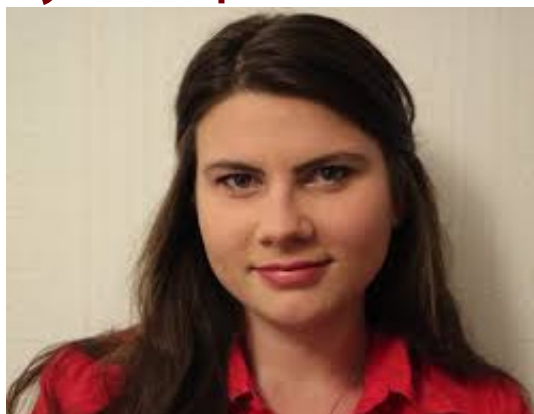
amended in several ways. Purely instrumental pieces are now allowed as well as those with a vocal element: the composition MUST be inspired by a text or texts in some way, however. Also, the composition can be for any number of performers and the minimum duration requirement has been dropped, although there is still a maximum duration of twelve minutes.

This exceptionally broad competition has recognised talent in a variety of genres in the past. It encourages entries in everything from classical, jazz and folk to singer-songwriter ballads, Asian music and rock, as long as the work is suitable for live performance and appealing to a wide range of concertgoers.

If you know anyone who might be interested in applying, please see: <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/conservatoire/about-us/news/philip-bates-prize-for-composers-and-songwriters>



# Ashleyan Opera Prize 2019



*Winner of the Ashleyan Opera Prize 2019 Alexandra Anusca*

This year's Ashleyan Opera Prize final was a wonderful evening of operatic arias performed by post-graduate vocal students in the Recital Hall at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. There were six competitors altogether: three sopranos, two mezzos and a bass.

Mezzo Samantha Lewis opened the concert with a stylish and effectively decorated *Dido's Lament*, followed by Mozart's *Voi che sapete* and Tchaikovsky's *Adieu, forêts* from *Jeanne d'Arc*. Her rich, powerful lower notes and well characterised performances resulted in a dramatic start to the competition.

Coloratura soprano Gloria Chan gave us an excellent Queen of the Night and *Ombre légère* by Meyerbeer, both with full bodied top notes and accurate coloratura. Her

Gluck opener had a slightly nervous start, but soon settled down.

Next was the only male competitor, Miles Taylor. His Handel aria *Sorge infausta una procella* displayed great runs and his diction was good. Following this with two Mozart arias side by side didn't show enough variety, although he did close with *Bottom's Dream* by Britten as a contrast. Miles' acting skills and use of props were commendable, but his bass voice needs to develop more so that his vocal expressiveness and flexibility match these other skills.

Ivonne Porras Ocampo, soprano, was next with Stravinsky, Mozart and Johann Strauss (wrongly listed in the printed programme as Richard Strauss – I wonder whose fault that was!). I was looking forward to hearing *No word from*



Tom, having been impressed by this aria on a previous occasion, but unfortunately I couldn't understand a word of the English. There were some lovely legato lines in *Ach, ich fühl's* but Ivonne seemed to lose her way at one point. *Mein Herr Marquis* from *Die Fledermaus* was well characterised but the top notes were not good on this occasion.

Jessica Webber has a large mezzo voice and good diction. She gave us a varied programme of four arias by Verdi, Saint-Saëns, Menotti and Donizetti. These well-chosen, contrasting pieces showed the range of her voice and acting ability, starting with *Stride la vampa* from *Il Trovatore* and ending with a happy, throw-away *Il segreto per esser felici* from *Lucrezia Borgia*. Incidentally, Donizetti (who wrote this) reached the ripe old age of 151 according to the programme, born in 1797 and dying in 1948 – the second major howler

in the printed programme. They really must proofread it more carefully next year!

Last but definitely not least was soprano Alexandra Anusca. She opened with *Sul fil d'un soffio etesio* from Verdi's *Falstaff*, followed this with *Padre, germani* from Mozart's *Idomeneo* and concluded with Micaela's aria from *Carmen* by Bizet. Her wonderful vocal freedom and beautiful high notes were truly impressive and she gave thrilling, well-characterised performances.

Accompanist Jonathan French did a sterling job all evening and adjudicator Paul Wynn Griffiths gave the competitors some useful general suggestions to improve their performances even further. He announced Alexandra Anusca as the winner before giving the singers individual adjudications and feedback in private.

*Sue Bates*

## Annabel sings with Heart of England Singers

Annabel Ledgard sang the critically important part of The Youth in the Heart of England Singers performance of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* on April 13th at Christ Church, Solihull. Her family was in the audience. Followers of the trust who have gone to recent Touch of Basil Concerts will know that Annabel has taken part as a member of Ex Cathedral's Academies

and even wrote a song, *Monday Morning*, that was performed by the Children's Academy in 2017. Her mother, Rebecca, is a senior member of Ex Cathedral's education team. Her performance was stunning and perhaps the first she has undertaken as a soloist away from family choirs and school. Well done Annabel. She is singing with the Academies on Sep 28th.



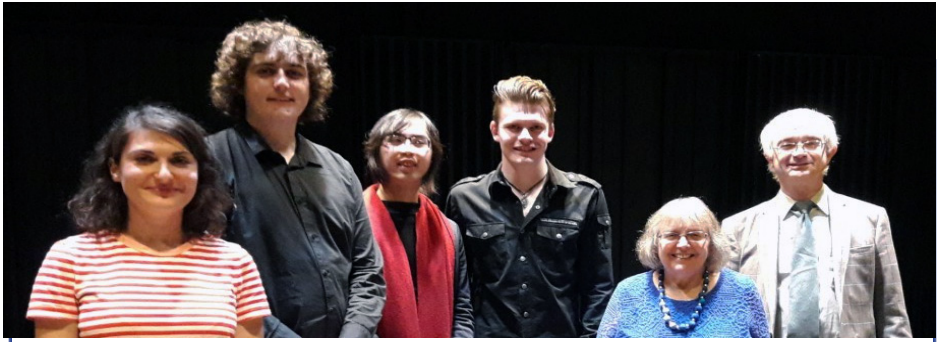


## Composition Prize Final 2018

We gathered in The Lab at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire last November for the final of the 2018 Philip Bates Prize for Composers and Songwriters. The five finalists had rehearsed their performers earlier in the afternoon – in fact all five of them were performing themselves, either as instrumentalists or as conductors.

played the violin part herself, which meant she was not able to conduct – and this tricky piece needed to be directed. At the eleventh hour, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire conducting student Joseph Davies stepped in to save the day.

*On his blindness* by Kc Cheng was a complete contrast. It used the well-known slow movement from



*L to R: Soosan Lolavar, James Abel, Kc Cheng, George Stackhouse, Sue & Martin Bates*

First we heard *Chione* by Peter Relph, a setting of a poem where the central character has been transformed into a snow storm. Written for soprano with clarinet, piano and percussion, this was an atmospheric piece to begin the evening but I felt it slightly lacked an overall sense of form.

Purcell School student J S Morris was next, with *Bénédiction* to words by Baudelaire. This piece for two sopranos, flute, clarinet, violin and cello was inspired by Impressionist composers. As the violinist was ill on the day Jasmine

Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* as a basis for the composition but superimposed a telling vocal part over it using the words of Milton's poem. A tubular bell echoed the dotted rhythm of the piano melody. The composer saw a parallel between Milton's loss of eyesight and Beethoven's loss of hearing. This was a very effective piece but how much of the effect was due to Beethoven rather than Kc Cheng? That was the dilemma.

Next came James Abel with *Emotion Zero*, the only entry from a Royal Birmingham Conservatoire



student. This piece consisted of two sections – *Depression* and *Stress*. Scored for soprano, piano, flute, violin and double bass, this was an interesting and well-written composition.

George Stackhouse and his rock band from Leicester finished the evening with two songs – *Awake* and *Steel Cold Heart*. Having been impressed by the recording of these songs sent in as George's submission for the competition, we were slightly disappointed that balance issues meant the audience couldn't hear all the detail in the harmony and vocal parts. However, as we were judging the composition rather than the performance we gave George the benefit of the doubt.

The Philip Bates Trust adjudication therefore was split between James Abel and George Stackhouse. The adjudicator appointed by Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Soosan Lolavar, chose Kc Cheng and James Abel gained the audience prize. The money for all three prizes was donated by Philip Bates Trust.

*Sue Bates*

## Baby Congratulations

Many congratulations to committee member Kirsty and her husband James on the birth of baby Isaac - a little brother for Elsie.

## Georgina Joins NYO



*Georgina Bloomfield*

Georgina has joined the National Youth Orchestra and will play at Touch of Basil and St Mary & St Margaret Church, Castle Bromwich.

Sue, my sister Margaret and I were thrilled to visit Symphony Hall in Birmingham to hear Georgina Bloomfield play with the National Youth Orchestra on April 4th. Followers will know that we supported Georgina and her family when she joined the National Children's Orchestra about 7 years ago. She has moved into the top rank now and has a full list of concerts with NYO ahead of her. The National Youth Orchestra was tremendous at the Proms at the Royal Albert Hall on July 27th a few weeks ago and also featured on BBC television. She will be doing a solo recital at St Mary & St Margaret, Castle Bromwich on March 8th 2020 to raise money for the restoration of the church organ as well as playing Bruch's *Violin Concerto* slow movement and a piece she has written herself at Touch of Basil on September 28th at BVGS. *Martin*



## Who did we help 2018-19?

Birmingham Opera Company - *Youth Engagement Programme* – disadvantaged young people to receive free tuition in singing, movement and acting resulting in participation in their professional production of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (please see article)

Black Country Touring – *Young Promoter's Scheme* enabling youngsters to become involved in the behind the scenes organising and promoting of a professional production

FOLIO Sutton Coldfield – *Big Draw Festival* – cost of professional artist to lead a day's illustration workshops for children at Sutton Coldfield Library

Duneane and Moneynick Schools – shared education project bringing together two primary schools representing the two different Christian denominations in Northern Ireland – towards the cost of employing a professional poet to work with the children and the printing of resulting poetry books (please see article)

Fermynwoods Contemporary Art in partnership with CE Academy, Northampton – towards the cost of undertaking Arts Awards to excluded pupils with behavioural and mental health issues

Warwickshire Choristers – bursary to enable a deserving boy / young man to take part in all the activities of this boys only choir for the following year.

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre – towards *Dream Big*, a Pantomime themed creative writing workshop resulting in printed storybooks and a visit to the professional pantomime for primary school children

Woodlands Academy, Grantham – towards the cost of photographic equipment for extra-curricular Photography Club with SEMH pupils, some of whom have been successful in competitions

Queen Alexandra College, Harborne, Birmingham – towards the cost of arts workshops for disabled students at *QAC Artsfest 2019*

Tredegar Community Band – cost of a student cornet and a shield for a Philip Bates Award to present to the most improved young player



Courtney Wedderburn / Niro Tha DJ – Serato Box to enable connection with sound equipment at larger venues

Georgina Bloomfield – towards National Youth Orchestra fees (please see article)

Matthew Bates (no relation!) – towards dancewear in his Graduate Year at the Royal Ballet Upper School (please see article)

Olivia Rowland – towards the cost of inks and materials for her MA course in Print at the Royal College of Art

*Sue Bates*

## Join us for Touch of Basil 2019

This year will be the 20th Touch of Basil since the first one in 2000. We welcome performers who have come along regularly and of course those here for the first time. We are again immensely grateful to Bishop Vesey's School B74 2NH for hosting.

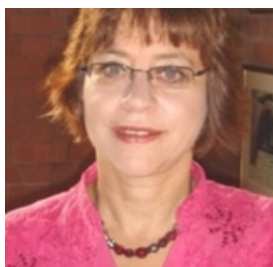
From the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire we welcome this year's winner of the Ashleyan Opera Prize, Alexandra Anusca, and the two winners of the Philip Bates Prize for Composers and Songwriters James Abel and George Stackhouse. Georgina Bloomfield returns for the seventh time to play *Adagio* from Bruch's *Violin Concerto*. Jonathan Styles travels from Germany to play Webern. Two wonderful young soloists who used to sing in St Alphege School's SongSquad will sing *Pie Jesu* by Andrew Lloyd Webber and we will be captivated as always by the Ex Cathedra Academies' young voices. Thanks to tenor Steve Davis,

Sarah Dudley with Basil's Bunch and Heart of England Singers for all of whom it is their 20th yearly performance.

For tickets please ring 0121 747 5705

## Duneane & Moneynick Poetry Book

In February this year trustees of Philip's Trust agreed to support



*Shelley Tracey*

Duneane and Moneynick partner schools in Toomebridge County Antrim, in their publishing of a school Poetry Book containing wonderful poems written by pupils with the help of poet Shelley Tracey. We received a copy in June with over 70 poems in print and the Philip Bates logo on the back!!