

A LIFE SO FAR IN MUSIC

by Liveryman Chris Lawrence

So, Chris Lawrence, Citizen and Musician of London, how did it come to be? What happened along the way to make you a musician?

First, I am not sure that you can "make" a musician – I believe that it is in us all to a greater or lesser extent.

OK, so what happened?

Let's go back to my grandparents in Gravesend during the first world war. They were both ardent chamber musicians. He was the doctor to the local garrison and the commanding officer told him one day that he had a young private who was hopeless as a soldier but who was a wonderful musician, a cellist. So for the time he was garrisoned there, a young Barbirolli came most spare evenings to make music with them.

My father was born after the war but developed a lifelong passion for music. Lots of prenatal stuff there I am sure. He dabbled in the cello and the piano at Stowe but was more a man of the theatre and ended up as a television director – Quentin Lawrence. But he listened to stacks of music – Bach, Schubert, Handel and Mozart were his gods – and they were always there right from the earliest times. He directed the first performance of Menotti's *The Consul* at Sadlers Wells after the last war and also was responsible for the television relay of *Noyes Fludde* from Aldeburgh Parish Church.

OK, but let's get back to you. How did you go from the little boy of 7 picking out hymn tunes on the recorder to cellist and Managing Director of the London Philharmonic?

Life as a cellist started at the age of 8 as soon as I knew that my father had had some lessons – I was given the music he had used. It was also bigger than the violin and this was an important consideration in the status stakes. And so it started – and rather drifted for a number of years – more interested in cricket, really. Cowdrey, Edrich and Barrington were far more attractive as role models than Boulton, Sargent and even Beecham and Barbirolli.

But then two extraordinary things happened that literally changed my life for ever – I was at Bedford School – well known to Citizens and Musicians of London through our fellow Liveryman Andrew Morris – but already in the throes of the Ted Amos treatment. A consummate musician, a magnificent teacher, enthusiast and human being. No boy who spent time with Ted and his staff could fail to be marked for life by the experience. So, back to the two things. The first was a recording of the Dvorak cello concerto by Janos Starker with Walter Susskind. I had no idea whatsoever that the beast I was struggling with could ever be capable of such beauty of sound, expression of feelings and drama. I could not look at the instrument in the same light after that! The second was finding myself in an orchestra at school that was going to

perform Beethoven's 5th symphony. I have heard the symphony countless times since then and always with that same sense of excitement and astonishment.

So there I was, mooning adolescent, bowled over by the sheer passion and excitement of it all, soaking up music in all its manifestations like a sponge! I was convinced that I was going to be a great cellist and that the sun would never set. Sounds familiar?

The reality began to impose itself. I had the immense good fortune to start lessons with Christopher Bunting and soon realised the eternal truth that technique is a means to an end and that complete mastery is given to only a few. Through school, Christopher le Fleming's son Anton who was on the school staff, I got to know various members of David Munrow's Early Music Consort and Chris Hogwood in particular. Their standards of performance – the quality of the singing and musicianship of James Bowman, Nigel Rogers and Martyn Hill above all did two things. First, and sadly, I had to realise that I was probably not going to be good enough for the top, but second, it made me realise the great treasure trove that was about to be rediscovered in Baroque Music and brought me into the circle of those who were to be at the forefront of its development.

But you did not give up the 'cello, did you?

Oh no. That was as active as ever. I was beginning to realise that music and music making was more than a hobby, it was a way of life. Make music, that's what musicians do, isn't it? But hard choices had to be made. I knew that I was not going to be a professional musician and was thinking of reading languages at University. I rather liked the idea of a year's travel before going up. As luck would have it, the acceptance for VSO came through the week before I was offered a place in the National Youth Orchestra, the summit of my adolescent ambitions. The departure dates for Chile, linked to the start of the academic year in the school where I was going to teach, were in the middle of the summer NYO course. I could not have my cake and eat it. So, I went to Chile and did not take the 'cello with me. Tough!

So, is that it?

No way! It was just the beginning of something that, although it was hard at the time, was absolutely the right thing to do.

Chile with no cello meant joining a choir learning to strum a fairly dismal guitar but coming across the fabulous wealth of folk music in Chile and Argentina.

Let's get back to Blighty.

Not quite yet. What I learned in Chile was that music is genuinely international. Melody and rhythm need no common words. The companionship that comes from playing or singing in an ensemble is as genuine if he/she is Chinese, Serbo-Croat, Brazilian, Spanish or Russian.

Harmony, counterpoint actually do bring people together on the basis of a common approach, experience, understanding and enjoyment. Making music together is based on an implicit trust, it has to or it doesn't work. It really crosses boundaries and is the most transparent way of communicating meaning and emotions that I know.

So back home to Leeds University – Spanish and Portuguese during my spare time and lots of music making. Peter Renshaw, now at the Guildhall was there and had a very fine quartet. Brian Newbould who has now made sure that Schubert's 8th is unfinished no more and a young Phil Wilbey coaching string music and performance. Through the NYO network I started playing quartets with a young lad from Leeds Grammar school who was as talented as he was short and who was to play a major part later on in my involvement with music – Marshall Marcus, a pupil of Ita Cohen.

With a languages degree it was inevitable that I had to do something professional. During my year abroad in Madrid I had worked at the Madrid branch of the Bank of London and South America. During the first few months I was paid so badly that I started playing the cello to make ends meet. The Sinfonica de Madrid was a good freelance band and I did occasional work with the Radio Television Orchestra whose conductor at the time was Celibidache. By Christmas time I had been offered a permanent place in a touring chamber orchestra so I resigned – or at least I tried to resign. I was in Madrid courtesy of an introduction from a main Board Director so, of course, Mammon won. They tripled my salary and put me into a furnished flat which they paid for.

So that was music over?

Well no. In Madrid I came across a wonderful German couple Clemenz and Maria Linzeil who held a weekly chamber music salon – the only one in Madrid at that time. Clemenz was a good pianist as was Maria. The leading Spanish instrumentalists of the day all used to go when they were in town and there was wonderful music making. Maria's maiden name had been Hess. Her brother had been the leader of Jochum's orchestra before the first world war her father had been the great oratorio tenor of his day. Both she and Clemenz were steeped in Bach. A great depth of knowledge, love and understanding of his music. The only other musician who I have felt came close to them in their ability to talk about Bach was the tenor Wilfred Brown. While I was still at school I took part in a performance of the Matthew in Kings College Chapel Cambridge where he was singing the Evangelist. He was also staying in Mary Pott's house in Bateman Street and listening him talk about the role of the Evangelist and its importance in terms of the place of the work in the liturgy and his own faith is one of the indelible musical moments of my life. But I digress.

So, University over I had to get a job. I failed the final selection board for the Foreign Office so I went back to the bank hoping to be sent back to Latin America.