

In Review: The 12th Lionel Tertis International Viola Festival & Competition

Louise Lansdown, Martha Evans, and Alistair Rutherford

Introduction | Louise Lansdown

The Lionel Tertis International Viola Festival and Competition is an event like no other on earth. Try and picture this: the global viola community descends on a tiny island located right in the middle of the Irish Sea; this tiny island—the Isle of Man—is thirty-three miles in length, thirteen-and-a-half miles wide, and occupies an approximate total area of two hundred twenty-one square miles.

A mere twenty-minute drive from Ronaldsway Airport on the Isle of Man is the small village of Port Erin where the Tertis Competition is held. The population of this little town almost doubles when the competition is held there every three years, with the pubs, fish and chip joints, Chinese takeaway, and cafés literally bulging with violists and their easily distinguishable hallmark viola cases!

The view of the bay, rustic and tired fishing boats, and Milner's Tower, which is situated on the other side of the bay on the edge of Bradda Head, are all features of the Tertis landscape. Now in its thirty-sixth year, the Tertis Competition has its very own unique flavor and quintessential character—from the Directorship of John Bethel with his right-hand lady, Gloria Balakrishna, to the quaint and characterful Erin Arts Centre, the walls of which are crammed with black-and-white photos of the hundreds of famous musicians who have visited and performed there over the years—the Tertis Competition is truly one-of-a-kind.

I had seven of my viola students from Birmingham Conservatoire with me on the Isle of Man, and while there we maintained a Facebook page with literally hundreds of photos and commentary from throughout the week. Aptly named “Tumultuous Tertis,” the page gained its title while we were en route from Birmingham Airport to Liverpool. After our flight, supposedly a forty-minute flight from Birmingham to Ronaldsway Airport,

could not land due to fog, we were forced to turn around and land back in Birmingham. A thirty-six hour delay ensued, and when there were not enough seats on one flight to accommodate all of us, we split up into two groups; one group drove to Manchester and the other to Liverpool (in a horrid school bus, I might add), stayed overnight, and then caught flights the following evening to the Isle of Man.

Each of my students, all of whom shared a house just around the corner from the Erin Arts Centre, undertook to report a certain day of the competition and festival to the “Tumultuous Tertis” page, and some days we even shared the role! Let me introduce you to the characters who contributed to our page. Meet Yue Yu from the Xinghai Conservatory of Music in Guangzhou, China, and Mabon Llyr from Snowdonia in Wales, both Year One undergraduate students who were absolutely star-struck having famous violists in such close proximity. Yue's English name is Daisy, and she was intrigued before we left Birmingham as to what sort of place the Isle of Man was; she even inquired if there was a Chinatown in Port Erin or a Chinese Supermarket!

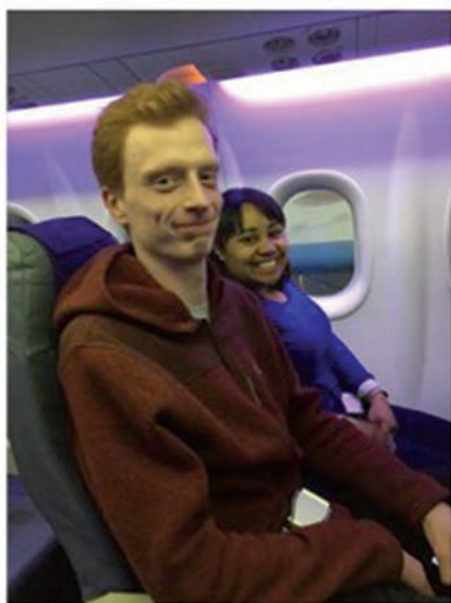
Alistair Rutherford, one of my Year Three students, was also with us, and incidentally came in eleventh in the Liverpool Half Marathon right in the middle of our travel delay; he used his time very wisely indeed! Rebecca Stubbs, also a Year Three student, from Huddersfield, managed to turn pages for several of the competition rounds and jury recitals during the festival. Both Rebecca and Alistair are performing the complete Walton Concerto for their end-of-year recitals, so the exposure to so many varied and brilliant performances of the work during the week was invaluable for them. Katharina Von Colson, a German postgraduate student pursuing a part-time Master of Music degree, is currently learning the Brahms F-Minor Sonata, and Lee-Ann

April, a postgraduate student from Cape Town, is currently learning the Rebecca Clarke Sonata; both students were lucky to hear each work in several master classes conducted by jury members—an enlightening, provocative, and engaging experience on so many levels. Finally, meet Martha Evans, a mature student, who is mid-way through a part-time Master of Music degree and is currently converting from a life as a General Practitioner to that of a professional violist! Not a path that is frequently walked.

We all wanted to try and bring this unique event to life for those who were not lucky enough to be able to attend, hence attempting, where possible, to deliver live updates and alerts of our experience throughout and to provide the backdrop to Port Erin; the beautiful walks, sunsets, camaraderie, and elements that made this competition completely unique. Please find our “Tumultuous Tertis” Facebook page by navigating to www.facebook.com/TumultuousTertis2016; here, the reader can access all of the photos included in this article, and a host of other images and interesting content from our time on the Isle of Man.



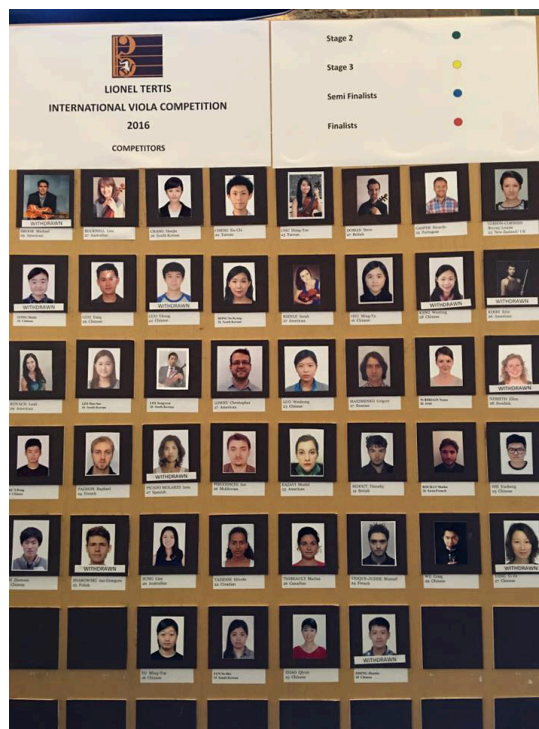
Looks like we are on our way at last!!!



Left to right: Alistair Rutherford and Lee-Ann April

The Competition | Martha Evans

Ninety-six violists from twenty-seven countries submitted applications to the 2016 Lionel Tertis Competition. Of the forty-four selected to attend the competition in Port Erin, thirty-three arrived with high hopes to progress through the second and third rounds to the semi-finals.



List of competitors in the 2016 Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition

Unfortunately, Round 2 (Solo Bach, Paganini Caprice, and a test piece by Stuart MacRae, titled *fenodyree*) and Round 3 (excerpts of a Viola Sonata and Concerto) were not open to observation by workshop entrants or members of the public. There was great anticipation, therefore, to see the first performances of the eight semi-finalists of Beethoven’s C-Minor String Trio, op. 9, no. 3, with violinist Krysia Osostowicz and cellist Jane Salmon.

We were not challenged in listening to eight renditions of the trio in one day; on the contrary, it was quite educational to experience the interpretative differences among the contestants: Steve Doman (age twenty-seven, U.K.), Ming-Yu Hsu (age sixteen, Taiwan), Hae Sue Lee (age sixteen, South Korea), Wenhong Luo (age twenty-three, China), Timothy Ridout (age twenty, U.K.), Lisa Sung (age twenty, Australia), Manuel Vioque-Judde (age twenty-four, France), and So Hui Yun (age nineteen, South Korea). Most compelling was Timothy Ridout’s



Competitor Hae Sue Lee with violinist Krystia Osostowicz and cellist Jane Salmon

unique performance; Mr. Ridout creatively highlighted certain elements of the score, which would have otherwise been lost to the listener.

It was no surprise then that Timothy Ridout joined Manuel Vioque-Judde and Wenhong Luo, who had also both given captivating performances, in the finals. Each finalist performed a complete concerto, the test piece by Stuart MacRae, and the Beethoven Trio. All three renditions were technically assured, musically engaging, and of an extremely high standard. The final decision by the judges was weighted by performances throughout the whole week and fell to Timothy Ridout, making him the first-ever British violist to win the Tertis International Viola Competition.



Timothy Ridout (center), winner of the 2016 Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition, with violinist Krystia Osostowicz and cellist Jane Salmon

Talks, Master Classes, and Juror Concerts

Alistair Rutherford

Talks

We were treated to a vast array of thought-provoking talks by many of the UK's most well-respected music professionals. On Monday, March 14, we were treated to two talks by Chris Milton from the Britten-Pears foundation on Britten and the viola; the first talk covered Britten's solo viola repertoire and the latter, his writing for the viola in an orchestral context.

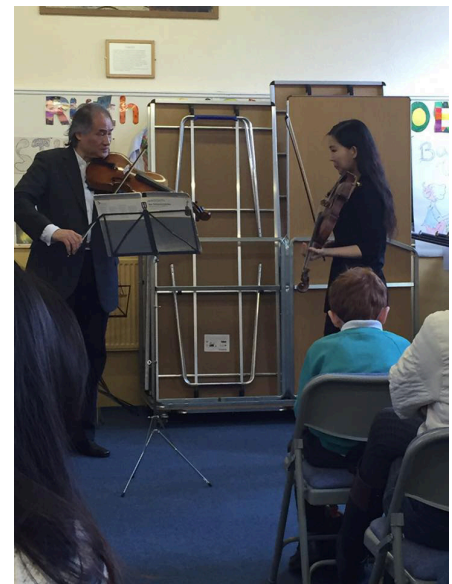
On Wednesday, March 16, we had another really interesting and informative lecture and discussion led by David Hume on "Matching Bow to Instrument," which is something that we don't always think an awful lot about! How healthy is your bow?

On Thursday, March 17, we went back in time with Tully Potter and searched into the Viennese tradition of viola playing; it was interesting to hear of so many forgotten viola players of the twentieth century.

Saturday, March 19 saw the last talk of the competition given by Sean Bishop from Bishop Instruments, London, who gave an interesting lecture on some of the gems of viola lutherie encompassing all of modern history.

Master classes

Each of the jury members gave inspiring master classes covering much of the repertoire played in the competition and some of the most popular pieces in the viola repertoire! The master classes were a very friendly affair, and the jury members were incredibly insightful.



Wing Ho (left) giving a master class



David Hume (right) presenting on “Matching Bow to Instrument”



Garth Knox (left) giving a master class



Pictured left to right: Thomas Riebl, Yuri Bashmet, George Caird, Garth Knox, Wing Ho

Wing Ho led the first master class and helped students with Hindemith’s *Der Schwanendreher* and Bartók’s Viola Concerto; he gave many inspirational ideas, some of which included feeling the natural weight of the bow (at all points) and practicing in the style of a singer. He ended with a thought-provoking idea: within classical music, rhythm is invisible, but by contrast it is always obvious within popular music.

Garth Knox also gave a master class, which turned out to alternate between Bach Suites and the Bartók Concerto. It was incredible how he described the inextricable link between both styles of playing and how one should utilize techniques from both styles to improve one’s playing. Here are some memorable ideas that he shared: strategizing the meaning of repetition, vibrato being a

tool of sending the sound further (like an opera singer), and focusing on the idea that the audience is listening rather than watching as a means to counter performance anxiety.



Thomas Riebl (left) giving a master class.

Thomas Riebl gave an entirely Bach-focused master class with his “teaching assistant” (his Baroque bow!), which can be seen in the student’s hand in the above photo. Thomas has infectious musicality, and it definitely rubbed off on all of the students in their master classes. Some of the highlights for me in the master class included having an awareness of large and small phrases throughout the music, playing at A=415 to experience the sound-world in Bach’s head when he wrote the music, and exploring the history of the style of dance movement as a tool to interpret the musical language.

Yuri Bashmet filled out the entire church hall and gave a master class to everyone who wanted to play for him—what homage to viola pedagogy! He gave master classes

on many great pieces of the viola repertoire, but the highlights for me were the Bartók Concerto and Brahms F-Minor Viola Sonata. In the Bartók, he spoke about the need to always question the sound one makes; for instance, recognize when one bulges the sound and how it happens. He also spoke about a figure of eight style of bowing and the necessity to always prepare changes at the heel and point. In the Brahms, he spoke about not overusing the bow and managing it through means of color and having a presence of sound at the beginning of the note.



Yuri Bashmet (left) giving a master class

Juror Concerts

All of the viola-playing jury—everyone excluding George Caird (an oboist!)—performed in evening concerts open to the public. This was a fantastic opportunity to hear the judges in concert and experience their interpretation of some of the highlights of the viola repertoire.



Pictured above, right to left: Wing Ho and pianist Caroline Dowdell

Wing Ho (March 14) performed the second jurors' concert of the week with a show-stopping performance of Qingwu Guan's *Song of the Prairie*, completing a program of Schumann's *Fantasiestücke*, op. 73; Hindemith's Sonata for Viola and Piano, op. 11, no. 4; and Franck's Sonata for Violin and Piano in A Major, transcribed for viola.



Pictured above, from left to right: Garth Knox and Louise Lansdown

Garth Knox hosted another fantastic concert on March 15, and the performance was dedicated to the late Sir Peter Maxwell Davies. Works included: Frederic Rzewski's *Sixteen Sneakers*, Rory Boyle's *Such Sweet Sorrow*, Benjamin Dwyer's *Imagines*: the first movement titled "St. John's Well" and the second "Rutland." Lauri Joeleht's *Chat Harmonique* was also on the program, and some of Knox's own works, including *Three Weddings and a Fight* and *Viola Spaces*, with special guest Louise Lansdown playing No. 4, "Nine Fingers"; No. 3, "One finger"; and No. 8, "Up, down, sideways, round."



Pictured above, from left to right: Yuri and Xenia Bashmet

Yuri Bashmet's moving recital on March 16 featured Beethoven's *Notturmo for Viola and Piano*, op. 42; Britten's popular *Lachrymae, Reflections on a Song of Dowland*, for viola and piano, op. 48; and Shostakovich's Viola Sonata, op. 147, with his daughter Xenia Bashmet at the piano. It was a night to remember from the president of the competition.



Pictured above, from left to right: Sophia Rahman (piano) and Thomas Riebl (viola)

On March 17, Thomas Riebl wowed us with his five-string viola, performing Beethoven's Cello Sonata in F Major, op. 5, no. 1; a world-premiere performance of the Norwegian Michael Andreas Grolid's *Images*, and Schubert's "Arpeggione" Sonata.

Final remarks | Louise Lansdown

I believe that Lionel Tertis would be thrilled if he could see the role this competition, now after thirty-six years, plays within the international viola community as well as the aspirant effect and ethos it projects on those few who are privileged to be competing. It was high time there was a British winner, considering the epic British role in the development of the viola's prominence (to name but just a few who played a part in this: William Primrose, Lionel Tertis, Peter Schidlöf, Frederick Riddle, Cecil Aronowitz, and Lawrence Power). It was with a heavy heart that we all left the Isle of Man, a return journey that was certainly nothing near as tumultuous as on the way there! We have taken with us the sound of truly wonderful music-making, friendships, and a sharing of a deep love for the viola in one of the loveliest places you can imagine.

Louise Lansdown has been Head of Strings at Birmingham Conservatoire since 2012, after working as Senior Lecturer in the Strings Department at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester since 2001. She is the founder and President of the British Viola Society, founder of the Cecil Aronowitz International Viola Competition, and sits on the Council for the European String Teachers Association, Lake District Summer Music, Quartet of Peace Trust and is the founder of the ARCO Project (a collaborative long-distance learning project between Birmingham Conservatoire and Soweto, South Africa). Louise plays a French viola made in Paris (circa 1750) and a Sartory bow (1890), previously belonging to Cecil Aronowitz.

Martha Evans is currently in her second year of the Master of Music degree at Birmingham Conservatoire, and studies viola under Louise Lansdown. She has participated in master classes with (among others) Tatjana Masurenko, Nobuko Imai, Thomas Riebl, Robin Ireland, Nils Mönkemeyer, Philip Dukes, Garth Knox, Predrag Katanic, and Rachel Roberts. Together with her colleagues, she recently premiered new music by Simon Rowland-Jones and Robin Ireland at the 42nd International Viola Congress, Porto, and has also made solo performances at Bogan house, Totnes (UK); Dartington Hall (UK); Hindemith Music Centre, Blonay (Switzerland); and Leiston Abbey, Suffolk (UK). She plays a 2014 Viola made by Frederic Chaudiere.

Alistair Rutherford is a Year Three undergraduate at Birmingham Conservatoire currently studying viola with Louise Lansdown. He has played principal viola with the Birmingham Conservatoire String Orchestra, National Youth String Orchestra (Great Britain), and has also played with the Britten-Pears and Birmingham Festival Orchestras. He has participated in master classes with Atar Arad, Thomas Riebl, Tatjana Masurenko, Nils Mönkemeyer, Roger Chase, Garth Knox, Bogusława Hubisz-Sielska, Błażej Maliszewski, Luis Muniz, and Robin Ireland. Alistair currently plays a 1695 Tyrolean instrument by Matthias Albanus with a bow from Matthew Coltman, both of which are generously on loan from Birmingham Conservatoire.