



The sound of chamber music

The Oxford Companion to Music says of chamber music: 'It is the delight of the performing amateur'. **Judith Abbs** asked **Bernie Meadows**, who leads the Playing Chamber Music group, whether this is still true of the group after 16 years. Photos by **Martin Goldman**

Is it a delight for the players in the group? Or, as all musicians – both amateur and professional – know, can it be really difficult and very hard work?

The main aim of the group is to enjoy playing. Obviously, the better it sounds, the more everyone enjoys it, so we always aim to improve our technique. We sometimes work on a difficult section but we prefer to spend the time playing, not on endless repetition.

In *Rees's Cyclopaedia* (1805), Dr Burney defined chamber music as 'compositions for a small concert room, a small band, and a small

audience'. Does that description fit the group?

We generally have around 12 members, whereas a professional chamber orchestra probably has double that number and a symphony orchestra could include as many as a hundred.

There are always changes in the membership of U3A interest groups. But when a new member comes to your group they arrive with an instrument, and when a member leaves their instrument leaves with them. Do you always try to have the same line-up of instruments?

Currently we have flutes, clarinets,

cellos, a few violins, a viola and a piano. We could vary the numbers and instruments if a new member wanted to join, but – as you can see – we only have strings and woodwind, with no brass or

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Leni Green violin

Anyone can join if their instrument fits in. We encourage people who learned many years ago and want to take up their instrument again. Also people who are learning a new instrument. People select or deselect themselves if they find that it is too hard (or even too easy) for them.

Traditionally, chamber music is usually played with a single player on each part (or melody line), while

percussion. There has to be a limit: for instance, we could not have more than four clarinets because they would be too loud, which would affect the balance of the overall sound.

Do you audition people before they join and do they have to be able to read music and perform to a particular standard?

an orchestra may, for instance, have as many as 14 violins all playing the same part. Do you have one instrument for each musical part?

It gives people confidence – and helps if they lose their place! – when someone else is playing along with them. Our choice of music is written in three or four parts, so with 12

players, we usually have at least two different instruments on each part. This works well, with violins doubling the flute line or the viola playing with clarinets.

Do you play an exclusively classical repertoire? Do you have favourite composers or styles?

We have a repertoire of around 140 pieces. Many of these are from

the period when the concept of chamber music really began, with music by Haydn and Mozart. Madrigals (written for voices) also adapt very well to instrumental chamber music.

Are you able to buy music that is arranged for your ensemble or do you have to arrange the music specifically for your line-up?

I produce all the music myself. I either take existing scores for trios or quartets and arrange the parts to



Melvyn Gilmont bass clarinet

fit our instruments, or I compose pieces especially for us.

Do you play along as you conduct or do you conduct from the front?

I found I couldn't multi-task well enough to play and conduct at the same time so now I usually just conduct. I used to wave my arms to keep everyone in time. Then a member presented me with a chopstick – so now I have my own conductor's baton!



Barbara Penney flute

Our publications

The Northern Line (TNL) and Update are each published three times a year. TNL is edited by Leni Green, with assistance from Judith Abbs, and

designed by Barry Davies. Update is edited by Jane Marsh. Please send Jane submissions for the next Update by 18 May to oriana.jane@btinternet.com

• The editors may shorten or otherwise amend articles to fit spacing and style requirements.

Editorial

When I was 13, I had a maths teacher who believed in discipline. When we handed in our homework, we had to put the answer between two ruler-drawn parallel lines and write 'Ans., ...' (the '...' being the answer). If we omitted anything, such as the full stop or the capital A, we were awarded 'zero, no homework' even if all of the answers were correct.

Fast forward 60 years to NLU3A. I am a beginner in a bridge group, where I consider myself to be a hopeless dummy. 'You are neither of those,' my partner tells me. 'You are a beginner and you're learning. We're all learning. Stop putting yourself down.'

Of course the maths scenario came from junior high school

(I'm American), but it is a complete contrast to the U3A, where members learn from and encourage each other.

For our 21st anniversary in 2015 we surveyed all members to get an overview of the composition of NLU3A. One finding was that over 90 per cent of members had continued in education after they'd left school and had retained an appetite for lifelong learning. We asked the question: How can we make it clearer that the U3A is not like a regular university – that everyone is welcome to join our community of people who learn from each other?

In this issue, four members tell us how they perceive the differences. In future issues we will explore other aspects of the



survey.

Also in this issue, we start a new series on the people behind local blue plaques. We interview the conductor of NLU3A's amateur chamber orchestra and we feature four visual arts groups, where everybody is learning and nobody is judging.

Happy reading!

Leni Green

Editor

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As I see it

Is it time to share ideas with other further education providers? asks **Keith Richards**

When I chaired the Third Age Trust (some time ago now – 2003/2006), many voices were advising that we drop the term 'university'. U3A Co-founder Eric Midwinter always says that they come back very five years. Officers in the Workers' Education Association (WEA, see below) told me that they were advised to drop the word 'worker'.

Others, however, were urging closer links with the established universities and I always heard them with equal suspicion as

WEA members were not happy sharing a teaching event where some people were both trained and paid and others were not.

many members seemed to be longing for what became known as the 'French version'. Put very simply our movement began at the University of Toulouse, where

older learners were warmly invited to attend lectures.

Readers of Eric Midwinter's *500 Beacons*, a classic text later updated by Francis Beckett (journalist and editor of Third

Age Matters), will know that the principles underwent a sea change as they crossed the Channel, and our peer-to-peer learning has



developed into a radical education system.

I did realise, however, that there was one university we should be talking to. The Open University (OU) was influenced by some of the same people as

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the first U3As in the UK, was financially viable in the early 2000s, held popular summer schools and breathed the same air as we did. I received a great welcome on many visits to Milton Keynes and over about a year many exciting ideas for cooperation were put forward. My successor, Jean Goodeve, signed a memorandum of understanding in 2007 at a ceremony attended by MPs and leading experts in continuing education. The following year one of the vice-chancellors addressed our AGM and conference but, by that time, the OU was facing a huge crisis following a government decision

to cease funding for 'second' degrees and the whole initiative collapsed.

Simultaneously I was looking into the possibility of cooperation with the even more venerable WEA (founded in 1902). We began in London and got as far as a joint conference, where plans were laid for a summer school involving U3A coordinators and WEA tutors. Sadly, this came to nothing as the WEA members were not happy sharing a teaching event where some people were both trained and paid and others were not. It is well known that as costs for WEA courses rose, some students migrated to us and some problems were caused by their

lack of knowledge about our basic principles.

This week, however, the Third Age Trust's chief executive officer, Sam Mauger, convened a meeting which I attended and all agreed that such major educational providers should be, at least, talking to each other. Ideas were again exchanged and it would be interesting to hear from North London U3A members if they can see possibilities for enriching the experience of students registered with the OU, WEA and a U3A.

KEITH RICHARDS IS A FOUNDING MEMBER OF NLU3A AND A PAST CHAIR OF THE THIRD AGE TRUST

Learn to teach, teach to learn

You can join a U3A as long as you're not in full-time paid employment; there are no exams, no entry criteria. Here, four NLU3A members – two students and two professors – tell us how they perceive the differences between learning in a U3A and studying in a higher education establishment.

Barbara Campbell, student, Open University

My father taught me, both by his words and his example, that it was important to go on learning new things. He enjoyed studying languages, music and science to the end of his life.

Since retiring, I have learned both by belonging to the U3A and studying at the Open University. In NLU3A I have taken up singing again in the wonderful Singing for Pleasure group and learned bridge for the first time. The singing has enabled me to join a church choir and sing ambitious music in a small group. The bridge has challenged my brain power. Both have enabled me to make

good friends. I believe this social stimulus is vital to preserve the little grey cells.

My first degree was in maths, taken at the usual age. But I always wanted to study history; I'm in my third year out of six. It is very demanding, especially the online skills that I've had to master at my vast age. It is important for oldies to keep up. Last summer I passed my first exam for 49 years. Great: I was the oldest person in the exam hall!

Two ways of studying, very different, but what a privilege.



Miriam E David, professor emerita of sociology of education, UCL Institute of Education

Last night I had an hour-long Skype with a Masters class on gender and education in Canada. The 12 students wanted to ask questions about my book *A Feminist Manifesto for Education* as a prelude to their class discussion. They introduced themselves, emphasising the educational or teaching components of their lives. Interestingly, there were three men, and out of the total, three were from black and minority ethnic communities.

I gave a 10-minute presentation relating my book to recent public debates about sexual harassment. Quick-fire questions followed from all, including referring to points on

particular pages and asking for clarification. Some pointed to my contradictory arguments. We discussed the difficulties of stepping outside of the so-called normal world to transform sexual and gender relations.

This morning, we had our U3A Women and Wisdom group, and I was struck by the similarities, although I was not doing the presentation and there would be no final assessment. We were a group of nine highly educated women, many also former teachers. After a talk on women and classical music, there were the same kinds of probing



questions about elitism and the lack of sound musical education. Rigorous debate was the essence of both.

Anil Yogasundram, MA student, Goldsmiths

When I started with the U3A I was looking forward to a different kind of learning experience to the one I had been through doing a teaching qualification as an undergraduate at the Open University.

I am now in the middle of a part-time MA at Goldsmiths, University of London. Despite time constraints I try and keep my attendance at U3A classes – the Chamber Music group in North Finchley on Monday afternoons and Bridge in Highgate on Wednesday mornings – regular.

Apart from the fun, and the valuable diversion away from

essays and exams, there is something very stimulating and motivating about learning new stuff, often from those with a wealth of (unpublicised) experience and expertise. Everybody has something to offer others.

Of course, the U3A is different from formal study at a conventional university. But what I have found they both clearly have in common for us of the third age is the continuing opportunity to learn, the very real mental stimulation, and the vibrant social environment they provide.



Jeff Duckett, emeritus professor of botany, Queen Mary University of London

The supreme irony of my U3A group – Climate Change, Science and Society – is that, after seven years, we continue to flourish and grow in numbers. But when I retired from university teaching in 2009, the same course was cancelled because there was: 1) insufficient student interest and 2) no one else in a School of Biological Sciences with over 70 academic staff who was either willing or able to teach this. Perhaps the student view was that knowing about climate change was not a key to a better

job. From the staff perspective there was potentially more grant income in other areas of biology.

These considerations aside, I deliver a lot of the same material to my U3A group that I did to undergraduates, but the reception is very different: none of the U3A group fall asleep or use their mobile phones and almost everyone contributes to our discussions at every session.

Whereas in the university course I followed a prescribed syllabus, in U3A we can explore new things as they come up – often completely by chance.



Even I don't know exactly what we will be talking about in every session, although I come armed with a Power Point presentation.

Group news

Groups organiser **Sue Teller** hands over to a new team

My time as groups organiser has now come to an end, so the following changes will take place in the groups organiser team:

- Henrietta Cohen will be the new groups organiser (henanded@gmail.com; 07976 903 767)
- Candiss Waldram will continue to be in charge of new groups (scwaldram@yahoo.com; 8883 1395)
- Ruth Newman will take over as venues organiser

(ruth.newman@blueyonder.co.uk; 8340 3516).

The changeover takes place after the AGM in July, and I will continue, in the short term, to produce the interest groups booklet.

Sue Teller

ginpalace@mac.com

Letter

A modest proposal: to print or not to print?

I am able to understand the reasoning behind asking members to print their own copies of The Northern Line if they don't want to read it online. I am certainly able to print my own BUT *it just ain't the same*, is it, as receiving a properly bound booklet to put on your shelves?

I also understand that there are financial constraints. So how about asking members if they

would prefer, at the present rate, to print their own, or accept the membership fee rising to an amount that would cover printing and posting?

I hope the powers that be at our splendid NLU3A will decide it's worth putting to the members.

Larry Ross

The eyes have it

Four visual arts groups share some of their work

Anyone Can Draw

Led by Judith McGirr, Anyone Can Draw helps interested members to develop their observation skills and to experiment with basic elements such as line, tone, texture and colour in a variety of media.

It is suitable for members with little or no experience and has been running for three years. The examples below prove that it is never too late to start and that one is able to continue to improve one's artwork despite the fact that the last drawing done was at school!



Highgate Woods – art on location: *acrylic*



Still life: *watercolour*



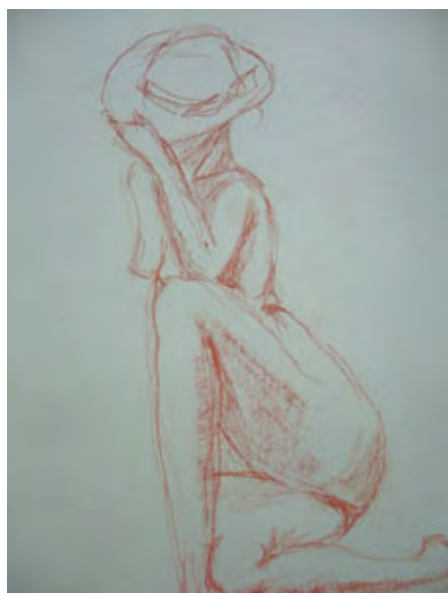
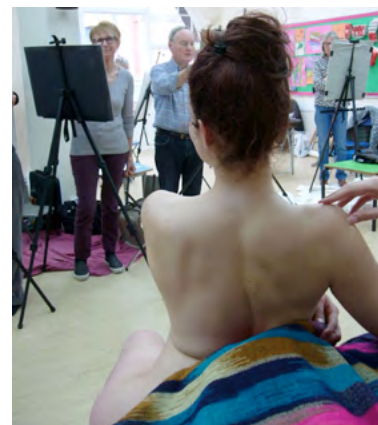
Still life: *pen wash drawing*



Zeng gardens: *watercolour*

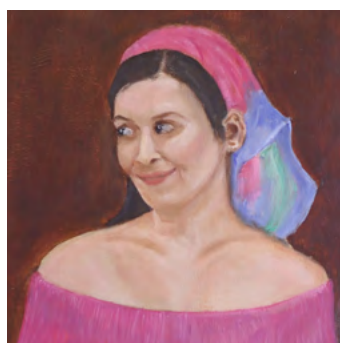
Life Drawing and Painting Studio

The studio is led and taught by Michael Richman, who follows a classical approach. Participants use many methods and materials, and there is a range of abilities and experience.

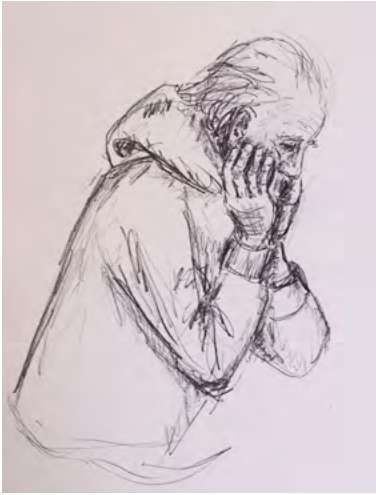


Portrait Studio

The portrait studio is guided and tutored by Michael Richman, whose special influences are Caravaggio, Velasquez and Sargent. Participants, who have a range of experience, work in all media.



Portrait Studio (continued)



Photography

Every month the photographers go out on a group photo shoot to a place of interest within the Freedom Pass area of London. Venues include markets, historical sites, museums, parks, cemeteries and churches. Here is a selection, chosen by the photographers themselves, from some of the shoots. The group, which meets on Thursday mornings, is led by Martin Goldman.



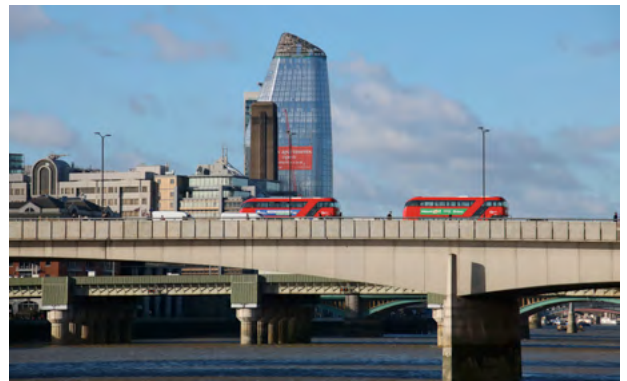
Military Band, Poppy Day, Leadenhall Market. *David Ramsey*



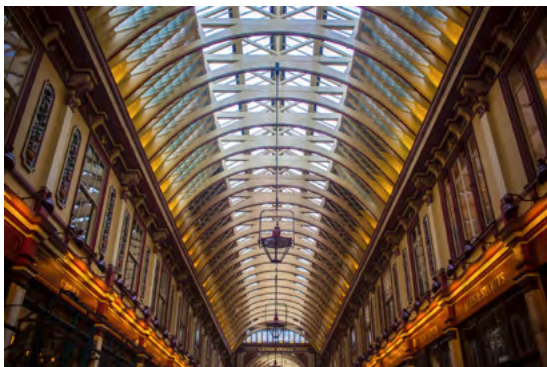
Ravens at Brompton Cemetery. *Caroline Goodman*



The Shard from St Katharine's Dock. *Joan Swann*



London Bridge. *Toni Morgan*



Leadenhall Market ceiling. *Martin Goldman*



Family of geese, Forty Hill. *Leni Green*

Blue plaques in north London

London's famous blue plaques link people of the past with buildings of the present. The scheme was started in 1866 and 900 plaques, on buildings humble and grand, honour the notable men and women who lived or worked in them. We want you to tell us about someone commemorated by a blue plaque in north London. You have plenty of choice! **Judith**

Abbs gets us started

A blue plaque on a house opposite us in Langdon Park Road, Highgate, celebrates the life of V.K. Krishna Menon (1896–1974), who lived there from 1929 to 1931 when he first moved to London from India.

Menon remains a controversial figure: both brilliant and abrasive. It was said that his approach was not calculated to win friends, but that it did influence people.

In the 1930s he was the founding editor of Pelican books. He was a Labour councillor for St Pancras for 14 years and was made a freeman of the borough.

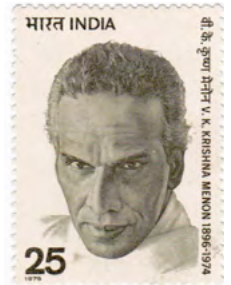
However, Krishna Menon is probably best known as the driving force of the Indian independence movement in London. In 1947, he was appointed as independent India's first high commissioner in London. After he returned to India in 1952, he was elected to the Indian parliament and led the Indian delegation to the United Nations, where he made a speech lasting nearly eight hours that remains the longest on record.

The contradictions in Menon's personality were reflected in his lifestyle: dressed in a Savile Row

suit and arriving in a Rolls Royce in public; drawing a wage of one rupee, using public transport, living in one room, and eating only toast and biscuits in private.

Menon was teetotal and a legendary tea drinker. Some say he drank 30 cups a day but others say it was 150 cups.

When he died at the age of 78, the Indian prime minister, Indira Gandhi, said: 'A volcano is extinct.'



Away days

organised by Jim Sweeney, John Hajdu and Sue Teller

Historic Jewish East End Walk

Friday, 18 May

The edge of the traditional City of London was an area heavily populated by Jewish immigrants from the 1880s onwards. We have arranged for professionally qualified tour guide Colin Davey to take us on a conducted stroll. Much evidence of the old community still exists, such as synagogues, a former soup kitchen and social housing set up by a prominent Jewish businessman. In addition, we will see a sculpture by an artist who survived Auschwitz internment, and the street that became associated with clobber. We will finish with a short poem that encapsulates the hunger of Jewish immigrants to make a success of life in their new home.

Times

10.50 am for an 11am start, from outside Aldgate station (Circle and Metropolitan lines) and lasting approximately one and a half hours. There is one exit from Aldgate Station, out on to the north side of Aldgate High Street. The walk will finish near Aldgate East station (Hammersmith & City and District lines). It is important to note that the start of the tour is



at Aldgate Station and *not* Aldgate East Station.

Cost

£6, payable in advance.

Booking is essential. Please use the booking form on page 11 or send us a note with the requested details and your cheque.

Modernist Hampstead Architecture

Friday 22 June

We have arranged a guided visit of the exteriors of some of the revolutionary modernist homes and idealistic architecture built in Hampstead in the 1930s, such as the Sun House by Maxwell Fry, and 66 Frognal, designed by Colin Lucas of Connel, Ward and Lucas. Much of this architecture echoed design trends in Europe but elements of eighteenth-century architectural design were also an influence for some architects. We will see some more recent examples, and, in passing, some striking non-modernist Hampstead buildings. Our walk will finish at 2 Willow Road (National Trust, and open to the public) near South End Green, with the option to go on to the modern Isokon flats in Belsize Park.



Park. Hampstead Heath overground station is also located there.

Cost

£7, payable in advance.

Booking is essential. Please use the booking form [below] or send us a note with the requested details and your cheque.

Times and travel

10.50 am for an 11am start, outside Hampstead tube station (Northern line.) The walk will last around 90 minutes and finish near South End Green, from where there are buses to Archway, Camden Town and Belsize

Away days booking form

Name(s)_____Membership number(s)_____

BLOCK LETTERS please. No more than two names per application form.

Phone number(s)_____

| Date | Name of visit |
|------|---------------|
| | |
| | |

- Cheques payable to NLU3A
- Send booking form and cheque to Sue Teller, 27 Midholm, London NW11 6LL. Please send a separate booking form and cheque for each visit.
- You will be notified **by phone if you have a place (or not)**. Your cheque will be banked or destroyed accordingly.
- If you are unable to attend the visit, please phone Sue Teller on 8381 4480 so that your place can be offered to another member, or 0778 478 428 for last-minute cancellations.

Summer term monthly meetings

All take place on Mondays at 10.45am at St Paul's Church, 50 Long Lane, Finchley N3 2PU. Refreshments are served from 10.15. Please note that, out of courtesy to the speaker and to abide by the fire regulations, you might find yourself locked out of the meeting if you do not arrive by 10.40.

14 May

Whose life is it anyway?

The play of that name by Brian Clark, which premiered in 1978, proves how long ago the subject of dignity in dying became an important philosophical discussion. It is still vital today that we consider the arguments in favour of changing the law in this country so that terminally ill people who want to opt for a dignified death instead of prolonging their suffering have that option. Three members of the north London group of Dignity in Dying – Sylvia Lewin, Derek Epstein and Janet Home – will talk about the importance of advance decisions as well as the safeguards surrounding the potential of assisted dying.



11 June

Developers and the City

When it comes to the names associated with prestigious City buildings, architects are in the front line. But what about the developers – the orchestrators of schemes? In this talk, professional qualified tour guide and former commercial property lawyer Colin Davey will talk about some of the buildings that, from the 1980s onwards, have defined the City landscape. He will also describe the characters, many of them larger than life, behind those buildings.



9 July

Annual general meeting

Further details in Update and the email newsletter

Term dates

The following may affect the use of some venues:

- **Jewish New Year:** Monday 10 and Tuesday 11 September
- **Yom Kippur:** Wednesday 19 September

| Term | Start date | Finish date |
|--------|-------------|-------------|
| Summer | 16 April | 20 July |
| Autumn | 3 September | 14 December |