

WYO Weekend at the Hayes Conference Centre, Derbyshire

Friday evening, dark, the coach was waiting in spitting rain. Nobody knew quite what to expect as this was a new venture for the County Youth Orchestra. I had visited the Hayes Conference Centre in June and Colin had conducted youth groups there before, so the place came recommended, but even the coach driver had difficulty in finding it. We arrived in time for a late dinner and then went straight into a rehearsal in the sumptuous setting of the Derbyshire Suite, a hall surrounded by practice rooms that would do any orchestra proud. As far as sleeping quarters were concerned we were lucky to have en-suite rooms in the main part of the house so the accommodation was looking good (and there was a bar...)

Because of the logistics of tutor availability all Saturday morning and the second half of the afternoon were given up to sectionals, given by Diane Slater (violin) Peter Wilson (cello), Stella Mackereth (wind) and Lesley Howarth (brass) and myself. After lunch there was a much appreciated slot of free time before we got stuck in to more sectional rehearsals and full rehearsals which went on until 10 o'clock in the evening. We finished the session with some singing and then the brass players led us down to the bar with some Viennese um-pa-pa music which helped to lend atmosphere to the other 400 or so delegates at this conference centre.

On Sunday we rehearsed as a full orchestra until the 2 minutes silence at 11 am (it was remembrance Sunday) after which Colin had to go to another rehearsal in Coventry and the wind/string/brass groups of the orchestra were able to rehearse for the Music Pathways concerts that were taking place the following week in Warwick, Bedworth and Stratford. We had a playthrough at 3 pm, got on the coach at 4 and were back in Kenilworth by 5.30. Spending time together making music is the most valuable part of the orchestra's life and everybody I spoke to after the weekend said that they enjoyed it and came away invigorated by the experience.

"Let's do it again every term!" was a remark often heard at the end of the weekend.

Michael Williamson
Manager, County Youth Orchestra