

The Press – 9<sup>th</sup> April 2018

By Stephen Lewis

# Concert memories: 70 years of the York Light Orchestra

ANY real public performer needs a bit of chutzpah. It enables you to bluff your way through when you've forgotten your lines, or cover up if you play a false note.

For Colin Allison it was a sticky key on his bassoon. He was in the middle of a bassoon solo for the York Light Orchestra at a concert at the Guildhall in 1983 in aid of the Bedern Hall Restoration Fund. To his horror, he found that one of the keys suddenly began to stick. "So every time an F came up, I sang it!" he recalls. "It was blind panic. But the audience thought it was a set up!"

He's being too modest: according to a contemporary review of the concert, the audience loved it. "Colin Allison overcame the problem of a sticking key by singing the offending notes and received a rousing ovation," reviewer John Cranmer wrote.

It clearly didn't put Colin off his music, either: he's still a member of the York Light Orchestra, and is now also its president.

This coming Sunday, members of the orchestra will be taking to the stage at the Joseph Rowntree Theatre for what will officially be their 70th anniversary concert. Held in aid of St Leonard's Hospice and hosted by Radio York's Adam Tomlinson, it will be a typical Proms-style concert, featuring popular classics, selections from musicals and themes from film and TV, as well as some Proms favourites.

"We play what you'd call 'light' music," says Karen Nash, the orchestra's secretary. "We leave the heavy classical repertoire to other orchestras."

In one way, the choice of this Sunday for the official anniversary concert is a bit arbitrary. The orchestra was actually formed - under the name the 'York Orchestral Society' - in October 1947. But it didn't give its first public concert until a year later, on October 6, 1948. Conducted by Con Martin and with the Orpheus Male Voice Quartet as accompaniment, the concert was in support of the Air Training Corps Welfare Training Fund.

So it was a year between the orchestra's founding in 1947 and its first public concert in 1948. April falls mid-way between the two Octobers - so now seems as good a time as any for that 70th anniversary concert...

The original reason for setting up the orchestra was to 'stimulate the interest of young students both at concerts and through the medium of the schools, with a programme of music to embrace classical, opera, ballet, light opera and the whole range of light classical music'. The first rehearsals were held at the **York College** for Girls.

In its early years, the orchestra often accompanied local amateur singing groups, such as the **Clifton** Hospital Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society, **New Earswick** Dramatic and Operatic Society, York Operatic Society and **Tadcaster** Operatic Society. But it also staged regular orchestra concerts. A typical early concert - held at the Imperial Club in Stonegate on April 17, 1952 - included Mendelssohn's Fingal's Cave overture; a selection from the Mikado; ballet music from Rossini's William Tell; and Eric Coates' 'Summer Days'.

In 1947, when it was founded, the orchestra had just 14 members, including four violinists, two flautists and two pianists.

Today, it is made up of something like 50 amateur musicians who meet to practice every Thursday night at 7.30pm at **Acomb** Methodist Church.

There are regular concerts in aid of good causes. "Our 2016/17 season saw performances in **Poppleton** in aid of the British Heart Foundation, Acomb Methodist Church in aid of the church Jubilee fund and **Selby** Abbey," Karen says. "We also perform regularly at a care home in **Fulford** and a school in Linton-on-Ouse - ensuring that live music is available to those who are not always able to attend concert venues."

But really its all about the love of music, and those weekly practice sessions. "We do the concerts for local groups and raise money for charity. But that gives us a purpose to have the rehearsals!" says Karen. Which is just how it should be...

Stephen Lewis

The York Light Orchestra's 70th anniversary Proms concert in aid of St Leonard's Hospice will be at the Joseph Rowntree Theatre starting at 2.30pm on Sunday April 15. Tickets £10 (concessions £7.50, family tickets £30) from the JRT box office on 01904 501935 or josephrowntreetheatre.co.uk

The Yorkshire Light Orchestra welcomes new orchestral musicians of any age. No auditions are necessary, but no training is given - musicians of Grade 5 or above should be able to cope. The orchestra is self-funded from member subscriptions and concert takings and donations. To find out more, visit [ylo.org.uk](http://ylo.org.uk)

Orchestra Memories

Tracy Bowen – Resident singer

"I started singing with YLO in 2001 or 2002. My memories are of Christmas concerts with the whip cracking on the sleigh ride, singing in the open air for the Masons, many rousing Proms concerts, going to Linton on Ouse Primary School and being evacuated from Selby Abbey. And of course rehearsing in Malcolm Galloway's front room but I'm guessing that's not very newsworthy..."

Mick Reeder – Trumpeter

"I joined the orchestra in 1960 when I was 18. I tried to join two years earlier but was told 'we don't have children'. How things change!

"At that time the City of York Light Concert Orchestra (now YLO) played concerts in the Tempest Anderson Hall, called 'Encore', which York council funded. Another change! We also played as pit orchestra for the long gone Clifton Hospital in the theatre they had for their own Gilbert and Sullivan opera society."

Brian Hibbert

"I joined the orchestra sometime in the 1970s. For many years, we had a guest singer at each of our concerts, including on occasions, Roy Howell. He was always popular with the audiences even on the occasion when he forgot his words and had to start again..."