

metropol Angela Bennett spends

five minutes with

Christopher Marshall has always had a love of classical music. He organised his first house concert in 1987 and wondered if anyone would turn up. They did, in droves! It was a wonderful concert and since then he has organised regular house concerts until 1996 when the concert series, Sunday Classics were launched. Christopher has enjoyed bringing classical music to Christchurch over the years, featuring many very interesting and talented New Zealand Chamber Music performers. After the earthquakes the Christopher's Classics Series had to move from the Great Hall at the Arts Centre but they have successfully continued and are now held in the Church of St Michael and All Angels, 86 Oxford Tce, usually on a Tuesday evening. There are two remaining for the year: 1 October and 5 November. I caught up with this ardent promoter to find out a little more about his musical passion and the current series...

When did you realise you had a real connection with classical music?

It was probably when a violinist played a short concert at the Yorkshire school I attended when I was eleven or twelve. In hindsight that was the point of inoculation.

Did you have musical ambitions from that point?

No, not ambition – just awareness that it could claim a deep part of me.

You grew up in England, when did you move to New Zealand?

I came in September 1983 with my wife, Jilly and son Michael.

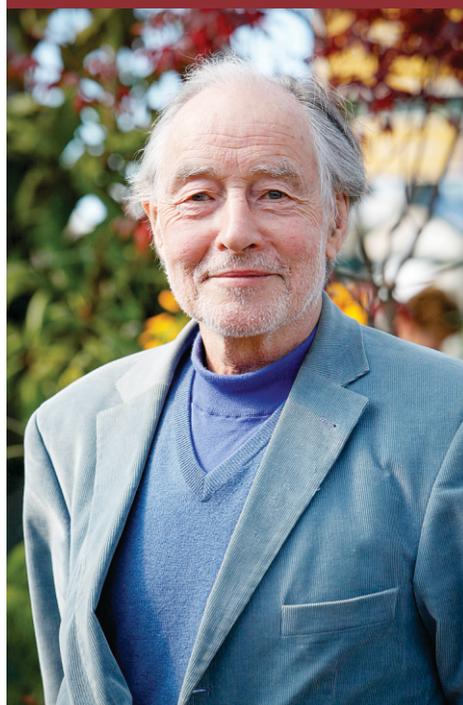
What drew you to Canterbury?

Jilly wished to live near her sisters and parents and at 40 I thought it a fine time to take a risk and do something different.

What inspired you to organise your first concert?

It was the local Ashley Community Arts Council

“ When we started, it seemed there was a real need for a managed series just for our own New Zealand musicians. ”



which encouraged me to join their committee. My wife and I had been to a house concert in East Yorkshire at Sledmere House just before we left England and that experience really encouraged us both.

Did you ever dream your first house concert would turn into such a long-running and esteemed concert series?

No, it was one step at a time.

How many concerts have you organised?

At our Bridgewater home we did 57 between 1987 and 2000 with the Arts Council. The Sunday Classics started in the Arts Centre in 1996. By this season's end there will have been 120 concerts.

Christopher Marshall

Which is the standout performance to you, and why?

There are half a dozen, but the first to mind is a concert that Dan Poynton, a Wellington pianist gave featuring the music and life of Federico Mompou. It captured the essence of the composer with word and music - very complete – not at all a typical chamber music concert.

You feature only talented New Zealand musicians, why is this?

We could not fit all into a series. Our friends at Chamber Music NZ cover the overseas musicians. When we started, it seemed there was a real need for a managed series just for our own New Zealand musicians.

What do you feel about the current classical talent in New Zealand?

It is absolutely world class, especially our top young student players.

You have two remaining concert series coming up this year – who do you believe are the standout performers and how can people find out more?

Our 1 October concert has three standout musicians - Diedre Irons, piano, Vesa-Matti Leppanen, violin, and Andrew Joyce, cello. Vesa is New Zealand Symphony Orchestra Concertmaster, Andrew is Principal Cellist with the orchestra and Diedre is a prodigious pianist – a dream team piano trio. On 5 November, we have Baroque Fireworks from NZ Barok. 14 players with original baroque style instruments are coming from Auckland to light the historic touchpaper. Tickets can be booked at the Court Theatre booking office www.courttheatre.org.nz or emailclassics@ihug.co.nz for an emailed brochure. To join our mailing list for 2014, phone Nick or Judy at 03 352 3412.

What is your favourite musical instrument and why?

I will cheat here and say all the instruments of a string quartet – violin, viola and cello.

What do you love about classical music particularly in a chamber music setting?

Intimacy – with an expressive voice and symphonic possibilities.

Who is your personal favourite musician of all time?

I have no favourite, so very many are wonderful in their own way.

Music is very emotive, what piece moves you the most?

Recently a performance of Peteris Vasks' Violin Concerto 'Distant Light' featuring my friend, the violinist Anthony Marwood with the Auckland Philharmonia was very special. And 45 years ago I heard the Amadeus String Quartet play Dvorak's String Quartet in F Major, Op. 96 "American" at the York Festival.

What do you love about live performances?

The vitality - and the sense that each concert has an apprehensive excitement beforehand. Plus the way the musicians communicate themselves through their interpretations of the music. This is rarely experienced in recorded music.

What is one thing Metropol readers would be surprised to know about you?

My car is a 1981 Honda Civic, my cello was made in 1710 and is played by Professor Alexander (Sasha) Ivashkin in London. I like old things! Sasha is not an old thing, by the way.

What is your favourite item of clothing?

A Gianni Versace Bobby Dazzler jacket bought in Maui just after his unfortunate death. It has now moved from the wardrobe to an art collection.

If you could go back and tell your teenage self something, what would it be?

You are doing fine, take your time. What will be, will be.

What were you doing the last time the thought went through your mind, "I shouldn't be doing this"?

You have just reminded me - I should not be doing this interview. I hope this promotes music, not me.

What's next on the wish list?

No wish list, just follow the advice to my teenage self, who sometimes revisits, for a chat.