

Liam Paterson – Report on St Magnus Composers' Course

The St. Magnus Composers' Course proved to be a most valuable experience. Working with inspiring composition tutors Sally Beamish and Alasdair Nicolson brought out the best of my compositional ability. I was able to discuss ideas on a daily basis, developing and improving upon the material I brought to the course. Such close contact with professional composers is a fantastic opportunity, and it has increased my self-awareness as a composer.

Daily workshops with the London Sinfonietta provided the perfect creative stimulus. All of the instrumentalists were eager to demonstrate the capabilities of their instruments to us, and this fed back into my creative work. In particular, a percussion demonstration was immensely useful. As my ideas developed through discussions with the composition tutors, I was able to hear the evolution of the work directly. This allowed for a constant process of refinement, which greatly improved the quality of the resulting work. Another aspect of this collaborative process was that I was able to create parts which were suited to the playing of each instrumentalist.

Further workshops led to a development of knowledge of how to write for other instruments. Allan Neave led a very insightful guitar-writing workshop, where he played examples of contemporary guitar music in order to highlight specific techniques. Fretwork contributed a fascinating workshop on the viol consort, suggesting approaches to writing for the instruments, while also demonstrating examples of early viol music. Another workshop involved our choir pieces (which were written before arriving on the course). This was highly rewarding, as we received feedback from members of the choir as well as the composition tutors.

All of the composers attended multiple St. Magnus Festival concerts, with repertoire ranging from 16th century viol music to contemporary ensemble works. Not only were these a joy to attend for the consistently high standard and interesting range of works, they also helped to stimulate my own creativity when writing the ensemble piece for the course. In particular, a performance of Peter Maxwell Davies' *Into the Labyrinth* was very inspiring.

Peter Maxwell Davies also gave a talk to the participants of the conducting and composing courses. This was particularly exciting for me, as I have long admired his work. To receive advice and wisdom from one of the world's greatest living composers was not only a highlight of the course, but also of my entire musical experience.

Towards the end of the course, our conductor counterparts worked with the London Sinfonietta on our compositions. This opportunity to be able to work with a conductor and explain our intentions is invaluable, as it is a situation that will undoubtedly figure in my future career. During rehearsals, Martyn Brabbins also gave advice to the conductors on the

interpretation of our works – in the case of my work, his suggestions helped add depth to the piece, and improved the final result.

The highlight of the course was the final performance of our works by the London Sinfonietta in the St. Magnus Cathedral. To have my music performed in such beautiful surroundings by such a skilled ensemble was truly inspiring. The concert was very well attended, which made the whole experience seem even more worthwhile.

As my report has shown, I found the St. Magnus Composers' Course to be enlightening, inspiring and challenging throughout. The privilege of working with the distinguished composition tutors, as well as the challenge of writing for such expert musicians, encouraged me to reflect more on my composition process and produce a work to the very best of my abilities. It should also be added that the wonderful landscape of Orkney was the perfect place to spend such an intensively creative time.