

# Sinfonia small but perfectly formed to fill a musical gap

ALTHOUGH I've been involved in music for as long as I can remember, I only took up conducting full time five years ago.

A year later I joined Welsh Sinfonia – and I'm so pleased that I came on board at a decisive point in its history.

This week we launched our Cardiff Series, which marked a seminal point in our development.

We are changing direction somewhat, to become "small but perfectly formed" and aiming to become Wales' champion of the chamber orchestral repertoire.

It is a decision which has developed over a couple of years and which will, I have no doubt, have a lasting effect on the musical life of Wales.

So why now?

This year the Welsh Sinfonia celebrates its 20th birthday as a professional orchestra. It already has a fine reputation among the scores of wonderful Welsh choirs and choral societies it has accompanied over the years.

It is, however, less well known in its own right, although it has performed a number of concerts and has developed an exciting educational programme.

I, like most musicians, have a passion for chamber music – the intimacy of the musical relationships, the freedom of individual

Chamber music is being redefined by the new-look Welsh Sinfonia. **Mark Eager**, the orchestra's principal conductor and artistic director, outlines plans for a special series of concerts

expression as well as the technical challenge of playing with precision and delicacy, being in essence, a soloist.

It is this familial relationship of a small number of highly accomplished, talented and committed instrumentalists – as few as seven or perhaps as many as 35 depending on the requirements of the music – which makes chamber orchestral music so particularly involving and enjoyable for audience members too.

My own fondness and interest in the chamber orchestral repertoire merged with a realisation by our trustees that actually this kind of music is under-performed in Wales and therefore relatively unfamiliar to audiences. It is a gap crying out to be filled.

Together we formed a vision for the future of the Welsh Sinfonia that redoubs the strengths of its players.

Utilising their expertise, depth of knowledge and the musical bonds that already exist, we aim to become a chamber orchestra of the

highest reputation. This is a hugely exciting prospect as well as an enormous challenge.

A grant from the Arts Council of Wales has enabled us to re-design our public face. We now have a new logo, a new brochure and a new website, as well as a terrific supporters' scheme which offers discounts on tickets. By basing ourselves on a core strength of 15 strings with woodwind, brass and percussion, added as necessary, we believe we have a realistic and sustainable future.

It is, of course, our concerts by which we will be judged.

In launching our first-ever concert series, *The Spirit of the Dance* – for which there will be four performances between October and March – I have created programmes that explore the relationship between music and dance expressed by composers from the 16th century to the present day.

Before each concert we invite ticket holders to join some of the players and myself for our free sessions to chat about the music.



**VISION:** Robin Stowell, left, leader of Welsh Sinfonia, with conductor Mark Eager

The first concert on October 11 will show just how varied and exciting music for chamber orchestras can be.

Aaron Copland's ballet, *Appalachian Spring*, ends with one of the favourite melodies of all time – *The Lord of the Dance*. We will be playing it in its original version for 15 instruments with the addition of dancing to new choreography by Debbie Chapman.

We contrast this with a beautiful Bach Suite for Flute and Strings

and finish with Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale Suite*, a masterpiece of harmonic colour, rhythmic energy, verve and vitality with unusual time signatures all firmly rooted in dance styles.

Throughout the season we are delighted to celebrate Welsh excellence; composers Grace Williams and John Meicall, soloists Claire Jones and Elizabeth Donovan plus our own chamber choir, The Welsh Sinfonia Chorus.

We have also commissioned a new percussion concerto from Eilir Owen Griffiths, for soloist Dave Danford – I fervently await the score as I write.

The season culminates with Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* – Wagner called it the "apotheosis of the dance" although according to Sir Thomas Beecham it sounds "like a lot of yaks jumping about". So there's a challenge for you all – come to the concert and decide which you think it is.

■ For further details on all of the concerts, which will be taking place at Cardiff University Concert Hall on Sunday afternoons, call the BBC NOW Audience Line on 0370 0010 1051 or visit the website at [www.welshsinfonia.co.uk](http://www.welshsinfonia.co.uk) For brochures, e-mail [anne@welshsinfonia.co.uk](mailto:anne@welshsinfonia.co.uk) or ring 01380 831454

ONE of the lectures planned for the Swansea Festival of Music and the Arts has been cancelled.

Paul Ferris was due to give the lecture on Tuesday entitled *Families of the Peninsula* but, due to unforeseen circumstances, he is unable to make the event.

For full details on the festival visit [www.swansea-festival.org](http://www.swansea-festival.org)

## Lunchtime theatre series returns

FULL-LENGTH Theatre Company's lunchtime theatre series returns to Swansea Grand Theatre today – but this time the format will be a little different.

There will be a new play staged on the last Saturday of every month throughout the year (with the exception of December). All performances will start at 12.30pm with a maximum running time of one hour.

Starting things off will be a new play by popular South Wales-based writer Derek Webb.

For details, call the box office on 01792 475 715.

## In Friday's Box Office



Ricky Gervais on his latest Hollywood outing