



Volunteer Spotlight

Stephen Dennison



We were lucky enough to grab some time with Stephen Dennison a volunteer here at the Arts Centre, and a major driving force behind our classical music programme, to find out more about how he got involved with Cranleigh Arts Centre and some insights into his love of classical music.

How did you become involved in the Arts Centre and what is your role?

My wife had been a volunteer at Cranleigh Arts for 10 years when I decided I would like to join the team bringing my business management experience to the board of trustees of the charity. I have since widened my volunteer involvement to include filling in gaps when other volunteers are not rostered. We have 6 days a week, 46 weeks a year, morning, afternoon and evening to cover. That is a lot of volunteer manpower!

Have you always been interested in Classical Music?

I started playing piano when I was 6 and continued through school and after till I was about 20. I then had a long gap and when my father died I found his violin and decided at the age of 50 to learn to play it. After achieving grade 6, I joined the Horsham Symphony Orchestra (H2O amateur section) which I continue to enjoy.

Tell us something about the Classical Music Programme at Cranleigh Arts that people won't know about?

Classical music at Cranleigh Arts has to fight for a space in a very busy and mixed programme of evening performance including film, theatre, comedy, art lectures, rock folk swing and other music genres and live streaming of National Theatre and Royal Opera and Ballet. We have calendar space for 9 concerts a year plus one or two specials. I source performers from young professionals just out of Royal Academy or Royal College of Music, to established international performers (who cost more!). We have a relationship with the Martin scholarship fund of the Philharmonia Orchestra of London three of whose prize winners are sourced for us each year from the many who apply. We are delighted to have such top quality professional performers in Cranleigh.

Why should someone come along to a classical recital at the arts centre? What is the typical evening like?

The best world performers come to perform in our village arts centre. Beat that! No need to take the time and expense to get to London, or even Guildford. Experienced listeners who heard Mengyang Pan and Ashley Fripp play piano at recitals earlier this year have commented how they could not have heard better performances anywhere. A typical evening is informal but focused. We usually collect performers from Guildford station late afternoon and they arrive to be welcomed by our volunteers and looked after (many say that they do not always get such a friendly welcome elsewhere). They practice to get a feel for the sound of the auditorium and then some have a banana and others have a snooze! I introduce the performer, but the best of them introduce themselves, talk about the music

and their interpretation and engage the audience. When I am selecting a performer, I ask particularly that they make friends with the audience rather than just play. It is appreciated. Most performers are willing to chat to the audience afterwards. We ensure that London based performers are back home for midnight.

What are your top 3 pieces of classical music?

I am biased towards piano and strings, chamber music generally.

- Debussy Images for piano (played at Cranleigh by Mengyang Pan in May) (<https://goo.gl/Zk3Nh5>)
- Schubert Impromptus D 899 for piano (played at Cranleigh by Ashely Fripp in January) (<https://goo.gl/LNSozu>)
- Beethoven Early string quartets (not particularly fashionable but I love them) (<https://goo.gl/ePRt3H>)