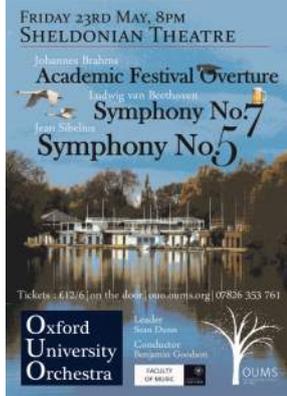


2014-2015 In Brief

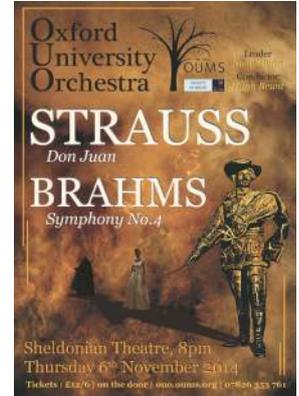
After a Trinity Term performance of Brahms, Beethoven and Sibelius the orchestra was very excited to be invited to resume their association with the Humanitas Programme and TORCH (The Oxford Research Centre for the Humanities), and play in an open rehearsal and masterclass with international tenor **Ian Bostridge** at the beginning of Michaelmas term (an account of which is given below).



We are delighted to announce that **Ian Bostridge** has since agreed to join **Stephen Isserlis** and **Midori** as a Patron of the orchestra.

New College alumnus **Hugh Brunt** (OUPhil conductor 2007), now conductor of the London Contemporary Orchestra, joined us in Michaelmas term to conduct a challenging programme of Strauss Don Juan and Brahms Symphony No 4. The orchestra rose to the challenge of the technical intricacies of the Strauss to give a rousing performance to a packed Sheldonian.

Dynamic Venezuelan conductor, **Natalia Luis-Bassa** returned for our **Hilary Term 2015** concert. Starting with the rhythmical Mexican snake hunt *Sensamaya*, we then welcomed back Venezuelan pianist **Luis Pares** for Rachmaninoff's Paganini Variations before the evening culminated with Ravel's evocative *Daphnis and Chloe* suites. The wind section, in particular, dazzled with virtuosic playing throughout. **Trinity term** saw the return of **Ben Palmer** to conduct an exciting programme of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, which highlighted the huge talent of newly appointed leader **Joanna Wu**, and Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite*.



The 2015/2016 year kicks off with Mahler's 7th Symphony on **Thursday 5th November** with conductor **Jamie Phillips** (assistant conductor of The Hallé). Tickets are available online at www.ouo.oums.org or by calling 07826 353761. **Hugh Brunt** then returns to conduct the *Rite of Spring* in Hilary term.



Future plans include an **Alumni rehearsal day** please watch our website where further details will be announced shortly.

Further news and ticket information on our forthcoming concerts can be found on our website www.ouo.oums.org and facebook page www.facebook.com/oxforduniversityorchestra

Dates for your diary

<p>Thursday 5th November 2015</p> <p><i>Conductor: Jamie Phillips</i></p> <p>Mahler – Symphony No 7</p> <p>Sheldonian Theatre 8pm</p>	<p>Friday 13th February 2016</p> <p><i>Conductor: Hugh Brunt</i></p> <p>Programme to include: Stravinsky – Rite of Spring</p> <p>Sheldonian Theatre 8pm</p>	<p>Saturday 21st May 2016</p> <p><i>Conductor: Robin Browning</i></p> <p>Programme to include: Debussy – La Mer</p> <p>Sheldonian Theatre 8pm</p>
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HUMANITAS PROGRAMME - Open rehearsal with Ian Bostridge

OUO was invited back by the Humanitas Programme to participate in an open rehearsal with Ian Bostridge. Four young soloists came to join the orchestra for a feast of Mahler Lieder. Principal cellist Jasper Bittner gives an account of the afternoon:



“Over the past three decades and more there has been a sustained effort in this country to devalue or deny the relevance of an education in the humanities, a humane, a liberal education – even to subvert its very meaning.”

With these words, Ian Bostridge opened his talk on Schubert’s *Winterreise*, the first of a series of events that marked his Humanitas Visiting Professorship in Classical Music and Music Education at the University of Oxford.¹ Why would anyone start a talk on Schubert’s much celebrated song cycle with such a bold accusation? Because, as Bostridge showed over the course of his lecture, music is about building, forming, and inspiring a personality in its own right. Universities nowadays have come under increased pressure to prepare students for lucrative careers. That is historically speaking a

relatively new approach to universities. And one that turns the experience of university into a commodity. Science, business and law degrees seem to yield higher value for money in such a mindset.

Yet this is not the way to approach a song cycle like Schubert’s *Winterreise*, a monument of western classical music that contains many dimensions simultaneously: Germany political history, the artistic perfection of the genre of “Kunstlied”, an intimacy that is immediate and acute. It becomes impossible to think of the individual, the society, or aesthetics separately. Artworks, literature, poetry, and music are not merely pieces for consumption; they are challenges to each of us. Studying a song cycle like Schubert’s *Winterreise* is a form of personal refinement that contributes to the Self and helps leading and sustaining independent and critical mind.



That was Ian Bostridge’s message throughout his visit. And it was the link that connected his rather personal remarks on the mother of all song cycles with his master-class on the songs Gustav Mahler wrote seventy years later. Together with the Oxford University Orchestra and four young singers, Bostridge spend an entire morning and afternoon working on songs from “*Des Knaben Wunderhorn*” and “*Rückert-Lieder*”. Bostridge’s way of working with the young musicians was characterised by an interplay of intensive focus and gentle encouragement. He knew exactly when he could demand more of the musicians and could push both orchestra and singers to a new level of quality. Music-making for Bostridge is as much an intellectually and personally challenging progress as it is about technical ability and honing one’s craft.

They are two sides of the same token. Mahler’s *Lieder* couldn’t epitomize Bostridge’s philosophy any better: orchestra, singer, text, and music comment on each other. An entire world emerged in front of our eyes, a cosmos of late 19th century romanticism, its dark soul, a deeply aesthetic sensitivity, a world that eventually died with the outbreak of the first world war. Bostridge, who tried hard to stay out of the focus of attention in order to give the impression of merely humbly assisting what was going on already, was a real magician in evoking that world. He carried the orchestra and the audience away for half a day to shores hitherto unknown. That evening, we all went home with a very different sense of urgency in the way we play music, a new understanding for why this Orchestra needs to continue its work at the University - and not simply for decorum.

© Jasper Bittner



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¹ Exerpts from this talk have been published in an article in *The Guardian* „In Search of a Truly Liberal Education“, Friday 21 November 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/21/search-liberal-eduction-disciplines-inspirations-newton>.