

Martin Angell

"It's never too late to be who you might have been." George Eliot

Starting cello lessons aged seven, Martin Angell was unusually lucky to have a teacher (Margaret Piggott) who could teach him right through till he entered music college in London. There on a Performer's course he learnt good cello technique, but not enough actual performing was included for his taste.

So he taught himself. A sidestep into folk music provided endless opportunities: twice a week or more in folk clubs doing 'floor spots', progressing to being the featured soloist (for money!), and playing with a folkrock trio. The atmosphere was informal: ***"You had to connect with the audience, by really performing your music, and by talking. You sing the chorus, the audience should want to join in. You play at a barn-dance, they've gotta be moved to get up and dance."***



A brief spell in Cambridge brought work with the best of the music scholars there – Bob Chilcott, and James Lancelot, with whom he gave recitals for Music Societies - and to experience a whole range of new music, sometimes weird, and occasionally wonderful. ***"But to really engage the audience, you mustn't get too clever. Keep your musical feet on the ground."***

To bring up a family, there followed years of cello teaching in Sussex, combined with as much performing as possible: with pianists, with The Laughton Piano Trio, string quartets, a modern jazz quartet, New Sussex Opera, The Corelli Ensemble... But increasingly the desire grew to do it unaccompanied: to walk the higher tightrope as a performer, ***"just me and my cello"***. He played for church services, for funerals, for a ballet company. His solo recitals centred on the works of J S Bach, and British twentieth century composers – Britten, Jacob, McCabe. Audiences were appreciative ***"but it didn't quite satisfy me"***.

Personal knowledge, personal growth. ***"I used to think that I was quite introverted. Then someone described me as an inhibited extrovert. Now I simply go for it: drop the inhibitions! And that takes me in two musical directions."***

One is composing. The isolation of the Black Forest village where he now lives gave him the opportunity – and the need – to compose his own music. ***"Drawing on all my musical influences, I wanted to write music the people here would enjoy. They do like music: Bach goes down well, but Henze, Crumb, McCabe and Reger really don't. Polite interest."***

Angell's music hit the spot. One elderly villager said "All my life I've been involved with music: the wind band, the church choir. But I was put off strings by learning the violin at school. Now that I've heard you, I can appreciate string music too."

The other musical path is back to the performing composer-cellists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: Antonii, D Gabrielli, Joseph dall'Abaco. ***"Because I am doing what they did, promoting programmes of their own music, it gives me a real feeling of connection with them. It's great music – much of it only recently rediscovered – and I love to bring these people's musical voices alive again through the joy of the cello and the music we're inspired to compose for it."***