



## A HARP FOR CHOGM!

Cecilia Sultana de Maria is an exceptionally talented young Anglo-Maltese harpist. She is currently in her second year of studies at the Royal College of Music, where she studies with Professor Daphne Bowden. Cecilia pursued her secondary education at the Purcell School of Music, where in her final year she was Head Girl and Principal Harp in the Purcell School Symphony Orchestra. At the same time, Cecilia was also Principal Harp with the London Schools Symphony Orchestra (LSSO) and The Royal College of Music (Junior Department) Symphony Orchestra and in 2003 with the National Children's Orchestra. Cecilia has been a finalist in the BBC's prestigious Young Musician of the Year. She has also performed for the President of Malta. These are just a few of her many achievements.



TCR Gala Concert  
Royal Commonwealth Club  
November 17<sup>th</sup> 2005

Cecilia, her parents and Alison Cox were the original co-founders of *The Commonwealth Resounds!* They planned an exciting multicultural programme of events for CHOGM 2005 in Malta.

*The Commonwealth Resounds!* (TCR) was kindly supported by Francis Zammit-Dimech, Maltese Minister for Culture, by the hotels, concert venues and by many cultural organisations, musicians and partners in different parts of Malta and Gozo.

Cecilia was only 15 at the time, and she set up a special fund to try and help musicians in developing countries who could not afford to travel to Malta. Cecilia's project inspired all the fundraising initiatives run by young musicians from The Purcell School and Chetham's School of Music in future TCR projects.

From March-November 2005 Cecilia performed as a soloist and as part of a trio (flute, harp and viola) in several Commonwealth events in the UK and Malta. The trio is pictured opposite.

One of the groups of musicians attending *The Commonwealth Resounds!* in Malta was the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force Steel Orchestra. They made a huge impact upon the Maltese audiences - everyone began to dance whenever they performed, and they received encore after encore! Cecilia developed a close friendship with these talented, kindly musicians, and when CHOGM finished in Malta, she wished above all else to find an opportunity to visit her new friends in Trinidad and Tobago. Alison Cox remembers her mentioning this years later, when she was Head Girl at the Purcell School!

In 2008/9, Alison was inviting musicians from different cultural backgrounds to consider taking part in *The Commonwealth Resounds!* Cecilia expressed a strong wish to be involved, and Alison was delighted to be able to include her. There was however one considerable problem – Cecilia’s harp!



We discovered that the harp would be too heavy to be taken in its travelling case via British Airways, and due to our very tight TCR budget, too expensive to take any other way. Not even Ghita Gommari from Specialised Travel, a miracle worker who was normally able to find a solution to every transportation problem was able to resolve this one! Many people who knew Cecilia were racking their brains trying to help. Daphne Bowden, Cecilia’s distinguished teacher from the Royal College of Music told Alison that Cecilia would probably need to borrow and learn how to play a lever harp (smaller and with a different sound). This was far from ideal.

Alison heard from Trinidad and Tobago that the Prime Minister had asked for a small instrumental group featuring the harp to play at his dinner party for the Commonwealth Business Council. This was an amazing opportunity for Cecilia, but we could not afford to get the harp to Trinidad.

Just one week before all the musicians from *The Commonwealth Resounds!* set off for Trinidad, The Royal Commonwealth Society generously enabled Alison to organise a Pre-CHOGM Gala at the Commonwealth Club.

This was intended to be an awareness-raising event to help promote the interests of musicians and other partners involved with *The Commonwealth Resounds!*

As well as the musicians and singers taking part, we were privileged to be able to welcome Fran Nevkla, Chairman and CEO of Phonographic Performance Ltd., and TCR’s wonderful patron John Smith, Chairman of the International Federation of Musicians and General Secretary of the MU.

During the Pre-CHOGM Gala, John and Fran described the Music Business Seminars that were to be organised in Trinidad, and also gave the audience some useful background information about the benefits offered to musicians by their respective organisations.

Cecilia had kindly agreed to perform a solo in the Pre-CHOGM Gala. She played beautifully with great expression and sensitivity. When she had finished, the audience applauded her warmly. Alison took the microphone and explained to the audience that she had been offered an opportunity to perform to the Prime Minister of Trinidad, but that we were not able to afford to get her concert harp out so it would not be possible. The audience murmured in sympathy.



John Smith and Fran Nevrkla came and spoke to Alison immediately after the concert. John said 'Is it too late?' Alison (*who had fortunately not admitted to Trinidad that there would be no harp for the Prime Minister*) said no, it was not too late.

It was then that an amazing, unexpected thing happened. Fran and John suggested that Phonographic Performance Ltd might be willing to pay for the harp to be transported to Trinidad by courier service, provided that it would not be ridiculously expensive. The miracle worker at Specialised Travel, Ghita Gommari, was again consulted. In spite of this good news it was difficult for her to find a reasonably-priced courier at such short notice, but Ghita is a wonderful negotiator and she juggled things around to find a solution. In the end the cost was somewhat more than anticipated; but Fran and John kindly agreed to go ahead with it. Cecilia was *absolutely* thrilled.

Cecilia says

"I cannot thank Fran Nevrkla and John Smith enough for the opportunity they gave to me by sending my harp out to Trinidad. Being able to share my instrument with so many people was an incredible experience and I only hope that I will be able to show my gratitude to them. I was able to meet some lovely people and in fact have been invited out again to play with a choir at some point this year, which I am so excited about and would never have had the opportunity to do if it had not been for their help."



The harp and Cecilia both arrived in Trinidad safely. The instrument was transported carefully by the excellent Route Two Transport drivers to many different parts of Trinidad, to events and workshops organised by the Trinidad and Tobago Entertainment Company. Everywhere it appeared, it caused a sensation. As far as we are aware, in Trinidad, very few musicians, and almost no children at all have ever had the chance to see or hear a concert harp. They were absolutely fascinated.

Cecilia says "I would be interested in looking into doing more outreach with my harp as the reaction I got to taking my harp to the university and schools was simply overwhelming. The children (and in many cases adults too) were fascinated by it as it was the only one on the island and I really enjoyed sharing my music and instrument with them."



On Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> November, Cecilia and a team of *Commonwealth Resounds!* musicians were invited by Dr. Vertrelle Cameron-Mickens, Associate Professor of Music at the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) to run some educational projects with her students. Dr Mickens was very interested in the harp, and wrote to Alison requesting that Cecilia perform to the students and talk to them about the instrument. Cecilia was very happy to do this, and the young musicians at UTT were very responsive indeed.



On Tuesday November 24<sup>th</sup>, Cecilia was able to accept her invitation to perform at the Prime Minister's Dinner for members of the Commonwealth Business Council on the cruise ship 'Serenade of the Seas'.

Quentin Poole, Director of Music at The Purcell School was invited by the Prime Minister to supervise and direct the performance and three other talented young musicians - Charlotte Ashton (flute) Georgia Hannant (violin) and Brian O'Kane (cello) were also invited to play.

Hundreds of the Commonwealth's business leaders were able to hear and enjoy the music and they made some very nice comments.

Alison is particularly grateful to Eddie Lee Tang and Charla-Marie Douglas from the CHOGM Secretariat who helped negotiate the harp through ferocious security restrictions!

She is writing to thank the Prime Minister.

Cecilia's harp playing enhanced many other projects throughout *The Commonwealth Resounds!* In particular, Lloyd Coleman, a talented young composer from Chetham's School of Music had written an excellent new piece called 'Crosspoint' for the Commonwealth Creative Orchestra.



The Commonwealth Creative Orchestra was an ensemble based upon a Western Classical orchestra but including instruments from other musical cultures as well. It is an exciting project that we hope to be able to develop for CHOGM 2011 in Perth, Australia.

When he heard that Cecilia would be able to bring her concert harp to Trinidad, Lloyd was delighted, and was able to find enough time in the few days remaining to compose a harp part. Lloyd is a highly competent young musician. He rehearsed his own piece and conducted it in *The Commonwealth Resounds!* Gala Concert where it received tremendous applause.



Cecilia gave a delightful solo performance of *Fantasy on a Theme by Handel* by Grandjany in the Commonwealth Resounds! Gala Concert.

Hannah Grayson (flautist) joined Cecilia to play two movements of John Mason's *Three Romances - Once, in a Dream and Sweetest Memories*. In 2005 Hannah was a member of Cecilia's trio in the first-ever *Commonwealth Resounds!* in Malta, and it was wonderful to have her return to help with projects and performances in Trinidad and Tobago. Hannah, like Cecilia, has many exciting ideas for developing musical projects and outreach work as part of TCR.



Cecilia threw herself into the whole TCR programme with great energy and enjoyment. She performed in Eugene Skeef's fascinating *Cultural Kitchen*, on the Caribbean Princess cruise ship where people were invited to perform, improvise together, listen and sample tasty food prepared by the Cruise Ship's excellent caterers. She also had a chance to try playing steel pans and percussion instruments in other projects!



Cecilia says

“ Whilst in Trinidad I learnt so much from the local people and from those travelling with us as part of *The Commonwealth Resounds!*, both musically and in my development as a person. The musicians who played for us performed with such enthusiasm and excitement which was simply amazing.

Whether or not I have been able to inspire them to play the harp, I hope that I may at least have encouraged some to look into the possibilities of music. There are so many ways forward for TCR and I only hope that I will be involved as much as I can be!”

“I cannot begin to thank the whole of TCR team; everyone was incredibly helpful in so many ways.

Many people helped by carrying my harp around for me and fantastic people like Kamla Rampersad de Silva organised private vans to help with transportation to different parts of the country! There are so many individual musicians and others I would like to acknowledge but for fear of leaving anyone out I would just like to say thank you so much to everyone!

My particular thanks however, have to go to Fran Nevrkla, John Smith - and to Alison Cox, without whom none of TCR could have taken place. She is inspirational and always so cheerful to go with it!”



“TCR has developed and changed so much since Malta 2005. One of my main memories from Malta is Gala Concert. It went so well and the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Steel Band finished off the concert and had the whole audience on their feet and dancing. TCR in Trinidad had the same great feeling to it and all the musicians, organisers and volunteers were putting their all into sharing their work with everyone.

I learnt so much from the musicians in the group and exactly as it was at the end of the Malta TCR, I was so upset to say goodbye to the beautiful country and people.”



"I really hope I will be able to stay involved with TCR. Both trips I have taken part with have been moving, inspiring and educational. Apart from the fund-raising concerts I have planned for late January and March I am thinking of opening up my charity 'Cecilia's Fund for Young Musicians' again to try and help those struggling to find the funds to travel out in 2011."



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