Thirteen-year-old Iain Hall, a NESMS cello scholarship student, recently visited 10 Downing Street as part of the launch of a new collection of Robert Burns coins and stamps, where he met the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown.

Iain has been playing the cello for about six years receiving lessons from James Halsey and Hilary Cromar.

In 2008 he achieved the highest Associated Board Grade VI mark awarded in the United Kingdom during that year.

At the same time, Iain passed Grade VIII on recorder with Distinction, which instrument he studies with Rosalind Coleman. He also studies piano at the school with Joseph Long.

Iain regularly enters the Burns Federation Schools competition, and in 2007 won the national final, becoming the overall Young Burnsian of the Year.

When the Royal Mint and Mail were about to launch a new series of coins and stamps celebrating the work of the man who is arguably Scotland's national poet, Jim Murphy, the Secretary of State for Scotland, decided to mark the event with a drinks party at Dover House. It was to The Robert Burns World Federation – who run the competition – that he turned to provide the entertainment for his guests.

Iain's duties at the Downing Street launch, along with six other finalists, were to welcome the guests by playing the cello in the foyer. During the concert, he performed in a string trio with his sister Freya on violin and Craig Paton, accordionist from Aberdeen City Music School. Iain and Freya, who is also a Burns National Finalist, played recorder duets together. Iain's final contribution was a solo on the recorder.

Iain says that he is uncertain at the moment about where his musical talent will take him although he does admit that: “It might be teaching. I have been inspired by my teachers, particularly Rosalind Coleman, who has helped me to reach such a high standard.” says Iain.

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Lunch Break Concert
THE TELEPHONE OR L’AMOUR A TROIS

This was the second in the latest series of Cowdray Hall Lunch Break Concerts and this fully staged performance of Gian Carlo Menotti’s delightful short comic opera The Telephone was presented by NESMS.

Two of the School’s senior pupils, Moira Docherty and Colin Brockie, took the roles of Lucy and Ben while Donald Hawksworth stood in for the orchestra with a masterful performance of the difficult piano reduction of the full score.

This was the third performance of this tuneful short work that I have heard in the last couple of years, but the first performance in Aberdeen took place in the 1950s and both of the original cast members were in the audience to hear Thursday’s production. Locke Nicholson sang the part of Ben while Jean Murray Smith (Jean Downie) was Lucy. That early performance was done with full orchestra conducted by none other than Donald Hawksworth who was the pianist for Thursday’s performance.

Both singers from the original cast agreed with me about the splendid quality of the singing. Moira Docherty’s beautifully clear and agile soprano was complemented by Colin Brockie’s light transparent baritone and crucially in a work such as this where the comedy relies on a perfectly clean and clear delivery of the text, I found that not a single word was lost.

There is of course a third character in the work described by Donald Hawksworth in his introductory remarks as the villain of the piece and that is the telephone itself whose ringing was operated exactly on cue by Kay Ritchie.

Our Bayreuth Visit

Ian McLennan leads the Newhills Piano Trio as a relaxation from his work as a lawyer. He is a pupil both of James Halsey and Adrian Temple. Sadly, Dorothy died in 1996, before she could see the School in its own premises in Huntly Street. However, we strive to maintain the high standards set and attempt to take the School from strength to strength.

DOROTHY HATELY
Dorothy founded NESMS in 1975 with the support and encouragement of Lady Aberdeen. Thanks to Dorothy’s dogged determination over the years, the School has greatly increased its teaching disciplines, tutors and pupils. Sadly, Dorothy died in 1996, before she could see the School in its own premises in Huntly Street. However, we strive to maintain the high standards set and attempt to take the School from strength to strength.

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Bayreuth is handpicked from the great German orchestras. But, when a production ‘works’ the effect can be stupendous. Achieving a successful production is often the high point of a producer’s or director’s career. The risks are considerable and the audience at Bayreuth are quick to tell the company if they disapprove of a production.

We were lucky though. We saw a successful production and along with the rest of the audience were pleased with what we saw. We felt privileged to experience something so special, which many opera lovers never see in their lifetime and we would both go back in a moment. We’ve booked for 2021!
Tutor profile – Michael Beeston

Michael Beeston considers himself extraordinarily lucky in that he has made a career from playing his beloved chamber music.

It was perhaps almost inevitable that Michael would become a professional musician. His great-grandfather was an organist in Blackpool, as was his grandfather whilst his mother was an excellent pianist.

From his Blackpool beginnings, Michael moved to the Royal Northern College of Music at Manchester to continue his studies and then spent a year with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra before joining the Edinburgh Quartet, Scotland’s only full-time chamber ensemble, in 1971.

“It has been a privilege to have a whole career playing chamber music,” says Michael. For nearly half of that career span Michael has taught at NESMS, a connection originally made through Tom Johnston and Dorothy Hatley. In 1993, Michael became the school’s first viola teacher, and at roughly the same time he spent four years as the music director of the Shell Expro Music School, which was an integral part of the Aberdeen International Youth Festival.

“I have always been impressed with the way that Aberdeen has been able to develop good musicians, particularly good string players, and I think it is as a result of the good teachers that are available up here. I thoroughly enjoy being in the thick of it,” he says.

During his career with the Edinburgh Quartet Michael has performed many new works and the quartet – with Michael’s daughter, Jessica, joining them for the first time – will be premiering a new viola quintet by the Scottish composer, Edward McGuire, in June this year with concerts in Arran, Glasserton, Glasgow and at the Paxton Festival, near Berwick-upon-Tweed.

[Image of Michael Beeston by Marc Marnie]
Best lot ever?

The Keynotes auction lunch, scheduled for 1st November 2009 and again to take place at the Marcliffe Hotel and Spa in Aberdeen, will have what Gordon Mitchell, chair of the auction lunch committee, suggests is perhaps one of the best lots to have appeared at any of the previous auctions.

The lot is a full day’s exclusive use of the Balmoral Estate golf course. The nine-hole course is part of the Queen’s Balmoral Estate and is only rarely available for corporate events.

Gordon says: “This is a fantastic offer from the estate because whoever wins the lot can take 24 of their friends or clients to the course and have exclusive use of it from 8.30 am to 6.00 pm.

“The suggestion is that the guests arrive in the morning for bacon rolls and coffee, following which they play a nine-hole round with a shotgun start, followed by lunch, followed by a further 18 holes in the afternoon, also with a shotgun start.”

Gordon goes on to explain for non-golfing people that a shotgun start is where players are distributed around the golf course on all the available tees and start playing literally at the sound of a shotgun being fired.

“Given the available date – 9th July 2010 – we are reasonably confident that there will be no other shooting going on to confuse the issue!” Gordon quips.

Gordon is confident that with the golfing lot, 2009 will be a bumper year although he’s pleased with what was achieved in 2008. “We raised over £8,500 in total,” he reports, although failing to point out that £2,500 came from his own efforts, where NESMS and the British Heart Foundation shared the £4,500 he raised by running his first full marathon at the age of 60! “I would like to offer my sincere thanks to all those who sponsored me so generously,” Gordon says.

One of the other lots already donated is a boxed set of 19 CDs recorded by Jamie MacDougall, one of the country’s most versatile singers and performers and a founder member of Caledon, Scotland’s three tenors. All 427 of Haydn’s Folk-Song arrangements are featured and will be released to commemorate the composer’s 200th anniversary.

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“This is a very serious opportunity that is hardly ever available and we will be marketing it very hard to the Aberdeen business community, as it has the potential to make the 2009 auction lunch one of the best in terms of the amount of money raised for the school.”

Gordon concludes by exhorting people to think long, hard and ‘out of the box’ about donating unusual and aspirational auction lots to make this year’s auction even more special. “The best ones are those, like the golf, that normally money can’t buy,” he suggests.