

INTERVIEW WITH LIZ Marshall

Monday 29th April 2024

Interview notes by Chris Firmin

Elizabeth Marshall

Born 1979 in Sussex

Dad a publisher, mum a teacher

Lots of music at school, visiting bands including one with a flute player.

Started on violin at age of 5, but heard sound of flute at 7 years old and 'fell in love' with it. Irish pipers an influence e.g. James Galway.

Played Belfast Hornpipe at school on flute.

Went to Steiner School which provided very broad music education (African etc.). Auditioned for the Royal Academy of Music where she got a degree.

Got to love Folk music in all its genres – found Folk very free and liberating.

"I taught at my school from the age of 15! As a performer I had the attitude of saying 'yes' to all opportunities to play. First orchestral gig was with the Royal Ballet of Birmingham."

Mum & Dad met in amateur dramatics and they would take CDs on holiday to South of France.

Met musicians in the West End and always would say "yes" to opportunities. Liz has done short runs in West End productions.

20th Anniversary of Phantom of the Opera - Liz played well in her first big performance. Was 27 years old and "petrified"!

West End is more important than ever! Well paid, great players, and has retained its wonderful standards and atmosphere.

Played at Spice of Life - brought classical music into Soho. Has also played at theatres including Royal Opera House.

Has done a broad spectrum of performance work - cruise ships, touring shows, 'random requests', session work and recording.

You have to forage i.e. look for opportunities.

Taught at school in Surrey in early years.

Skills needed for 'live' work: time management, personable, well-rehearsed, good team player.

Must 'calm oneself', 'fight the nerves'

Must try to empathise with an unfamiliar style or context.

Love playing 'live'

Challenges: overcoming the nerves and insecurities that are often experienced in one's youth.

Audiences: yes, they can differ - a classical music audience may demand something specific – a 'West End' audience might demand to be entertained.

Folk music opened up a liberated area for LM. Can write songs etc. Can learn about people – visiting Senegal for example. LM participated in the huge “Freedom to Roam’ event which was subject of documentary.

Characters in music industry – Peter Gabriel is one big influence.

Drugs & Alcohol? No firm evidence of mis-use in LM’s experience though musicians do like to party after a gig. Funding cuts are a worry that affects musicians.

Music is a vocation which takes over your life. Music can both enhance and adversely affect aspects of your life.

Key influences and mentor: Michael Cox, BBC Symphony Orchestra.

Musicians Union can be very helpful when needed.

Women: the current balance of women participating in music is better than it was, though still not equal with men.

Ethnicity: very important these days to achieve diversity, especially in Folk music with its social commentary.

Over the years – more inclusivity these days.

Logistics: LM’s policy is to turn up 1 hour early to allow for unloading, setting up, sound-check etc. But worth it!

In the ‘Lion King’ I picked up wrong instrument and then played in wrong key – other people noticed – rather embarrassing!

Peter Gabriel tours. Gig at Royal Opera House sitting in a tree playing flute.

Fear judgment of others? But no fears currently.

Not enough diversity, inclusivity? Not enough funding for orchestras. Brexit has probably had an adverse effect on musical exchanges with EU countries. In spite of these factors, England does have brilliant orchestras, writers and musicians.

Changes in ‘live’ music? Awareness of inclusivity, diversity and equality has been very positive.

As a freelancer, do more remote recording etc. especially post pandemic.

Retirement? ‘What does retirement mean? Musicians don’t really think about retirement’

“As you get older you want to be able to do great music really well. I have pushed myself hard but always wanted to do better. Have achieved at least some of this – often feel exhausted but really happy.”

“It is sometimes difficult to choose between Folk music and orchestral work. An orchestra will be committed to fulfilling a month of assigned concerts. Although I ‘dep’ in various orchestras I am not fully committed to any single orchestra as I’m not an ongoing member.”