



Making Music/Lady Hilary Groves Prize 2018

I/we would like to make a nomination for the Making Music Lady Hilary Groves Prize 2018 in recognition of outstanding contribution to music in the community.

Name of nominee	James Joseph
Making Music member group	Abergavenny Orchestral Society
Proposed by	Pete Geraghty, Chairman
Making Music group	Abergavenny Orchestral Society
Contact address	Palisades Walterstone Hereford
Post Code	HR2 0DX
Telephone no.	01873 890354
Email	peterjgeraghty22@gmail.com

Signed . *Peter Geraghty*

Date *11th August 2018*

James Joseph - "an outstanding contribution to music in the community"

When colleagues drew my attention to this award, and suggested James, my immediate reaction was that it could have been tailor-made to fit him. For nearly thirty years James has been at the heart of the "classical" musical life of our area and community. He has been active in many ways, which I will summarise. I have quoted others of his colleagues to give you more detail.

He ran a shop, Abergavenny Music, which was a hub, or perhaps a beacon, for anyone wanting to buy recordings, sheet music, tickets to live events, or just to hear what was playing in the shop and talk about anything musical. James's ability to recommend what was good, what was interesting, and his ability to find and supply whatever his customers wanted, was legendary.

As a chamber musician, James was sought after because of his fearless willingness to tackle anything – and always to find what was good in it, and then find a way to make musical sense of it. Typically, although his first and greatest passion was for grand opera, he was also hugely enthusiastic about baroque, and he became a very accomplished continuo player, in great demand for orchestral music as well as smaller ensembles.

As an accompanist and repetiteur, he was a mainstay of several choral societies in the area, as well as the Abergavenny Eisteddfod.

He was also a prolific and enthusiastic concert goer, and an "evangelist", publicist, supporter and organiser for many local groups. He knows everyone – whatever musical resource or person is needed, it's always worth asking James who to ask or where to look.

He is also a self-taught percussionist, good enough to play with several fine local orchestras.

One of the most inspiring things about James is that what excites him about music is the communication, the shared experience, which can be achieved by musicians and audiences. Although interested in and impressed by technique, and although he is himself a fine technical musician, he has often told me how wonderful it is that people with flawed or limited technique can still achieve really sublime musical moments, and that people with marvelous technique can still fail to do so! I think this is central to the reason why he has such a huge range of musical friends and collaborators, ranging from professionals to rank amateurs, all of whom get something special from interacting with him. It is because he is always striving for, and looking for that special experience. And because he is so passionate about it. And enjoys it so much!

This brings me to his involvement with Abergavenny Orchestral Society, which began with "guest appearances" in pieces which needed a piano, but became increasingly pivotal as time went on. It's impossible to spell out all he did for the society so instead I will try to illustrate what is special about him by just picking three of the "workshop days" the orchestra has run. One of our early efforts was "West Side Story" in 2010. There were only about 30 of us playing then -so lots of missing parts – we were having fun, but to be frank there was very limited musical meaning on offer to any listeners! James was new to us, and couldn't get there that day until we'd been playing for an hour, but on arrival he immediately and dramatically transformed the mood by injecting some really dangerous piano playing. Soon he was also filling in various missing percussion parts with his keyboard, and suddenly it was serious – in fact, suddenly it was music!

After that, he decided he liked playing in a symphony orchestra, and with no more ado he joined as "trainee percussionist". He taught himself to play, and he begged, borrowed and bought kit for us, and found other people to come and play it with him. We became an orchestra with its own percussion section, and our rehearsal experience was immeasurably better. Roll on to 2014, a workshop on "The Planets", with 60 people playing, and a large percussion section (lined up by James), but late drop outs meant that instead of 6 timpani with 2 timpanists we only had 2 timpani and James stepping up to become the sole timpanist. Somehow he managed to make it work, and in fact, sound great. I don't know how he did it, but the day was a great success, an immersive experience for all taking part, and we knew we had really achieved something.

Move forward again, to 2017 – the workshop was Mahler 2, "The Resurrection". James suggested the piece, James coordinated the choir, James found the soloists, James fixed a

complete percussion section (players and kit). We had over 100 players in the orchestra, and the day was extremely moving for all involved. It wasn't just an "achievement", but quite an emotional experience.

I've written about these three events to try and convey the *quality* of the impetus he has given to AOS and how he has enriched its life. Of course, they are just a tiny sample of his huge contribution. But what is really outstanding about James is that what he did for AOS is typical of his contributions to many groups, and to many aspects of music across the area. The range of his passions, activities, and abilities, combined with his self-effacing nature, means that in fact it has been impossible to put together a complete picture of everything he did, without him knowing about it. Sometimes I feel I have only seen the tip of the iceberg.

Tragically, James was diagnosed with an inoperable brain cancer last year, and within a few weeks he was no longer able to play. His colleagues feel that this award would be a very fitting recognition for all he has given to those around him in the musical community of South Wales. Here is a small selection from the things that people have written to support his nomination.

From Kaye Bennett, Rosie Evans and Angela Marshall, colleagues in the Abergavenny Music Shop:

James opened Abergavenny Music in 1990, as a principally classical music outlet, but was soon supplying CDs and sheet music for all genres, and over the subsequent years became a well-loved, respected, musical 'fount of all knowledge'. No request was denied, however obscure, and he pleased many ardent collectors by finding interesting recordings. Staff, including Saturday 'boys and girls', learnt so much over their time of working for James, who proved to be a very caring and nurturing employer..... James's knowledge of music, especially opera, is second to none and he encouraged us to listen to music of all genres while working. There were often occasions when a customer would say "What's that playing? That's wonderful! I'll buy that" - introducing people to music they might not normally have encountered. He encouraged us all to participate in singing, making music and to attend concerts. The shop was a focal point for information of local musical events, sold concert tickets, and was the 'go to' place for anyone wanting information on any aspect of classical music. Customers came from far and wide for the musical knowledge and personal service. Musical knowledge was fostered and developed by James not by 'teaching' but as an extension of his own vast knowledge of, and passion for, classical music. Our orders were far from solely classical, and we very much enjoyed the challenge of fulfilling the wishes of Abergavenny locals, whatever their musical tastes. We were also able to supply bulk orders to organisations such as libraries, schools, colleges and choirs in the area. The local musical community was always welcomed at the shop with no suggestion that a purchase was required. Rather, James would press a freshly-brewed coffee into their hands and enjoy discussing a recent or upcoming performance of some sort. Many a society benefited from a generous donation, and no schoolteacher who came in search of a raffle prize went away empty-handed. Local choirs and other societies were also helped by our providing a ticket-collection point and we displayed information about the many musical activities that Abergavenny spawns.

From Rosemary Williams (Chairperson Abergavenny Eisteddfod)

James was a keen member of Abergavenny Eisteddfod and his talent in accompanying Musical entries was exceptional. He dedicated his time during the prelims and the evening Gala Concert with pride and joy. He could accompany instrumentalist and soloist adapting to their needs with ease. Recognition for his musical contribution should be given to show appreciation of all his work.

From Dennis Simons, MD Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra, former leader BBC Philharmonic

It is my great pleasure to write on behalf of James Joseph, who I believe would be a worthy recipient of this prestigious award. He is exceptional. He has a generosity of spirit that is

matchless; a talent that is extraordinary both as a musician and as a person whose enthusiasm compels others to share his love of music. To witness, across the orchestra, James organizing and encouraging the percussion section was an inspiration. One example of his creative input was his role in the workshop on the second symphony of Gustav Mahler, a project which presents potentially insurmountable challenges for an organization such as ours. Many participants traveled long distances to be a part of this project and a comment made to me by one of these that 'it had been the best day of his life' demonstrates just how important people like James are to the mission of bringing real live musical experiences to all. I have considered myself very fortunate to have had a person involved in our organization who possesses such a passion for music and is so willing and immensely capable of rising to the challenges presented.

From Steve Marshall, MD Crickhowell Choral Society, MD Unicorn Singers, MD Langattock Church Choir

I cannot think of another person who has supported music-making at all levels to such an extent and high degree as James. Not only did his shop provide a focal point for all music lovers to meet, organise and promote events but his abilities as a répétiteur, accompanist and singer contributed vital expertise to many groups both locally and further afield. I was always able to rely upon James, who proved a crucial asset to everything we performed. His skills enabled us to rehearse and perform a great variety of music, such as Messiah and Bach's Mass in B minor but also more esoteric repertoire, such as Buxtehude and Monteverdi. James proved a most competent continuo player, which gave us the opportunity to work alongside professionals such as Elin Manahan Thomas, Charles Daniels and Catherine King. James also became our church organist for many services with ambitious items, such as James MacMillan's Mass and Bach cantatas. In simple terms, James was a pivotal spark in all our community music-making, who gave unstintingly of his time and skills to serve a tremendous variety and quality of initiatives.

From Michael Bell MBE, MD Brecknock Sinfonia, MD Cardiff Philharmonic Orchestra

It has been a joy to work with James, with the Brecknock Sinfonia in pieces ranging from Saint Saëns' Organ Symphony to Leroy Anderson's The Typewriter:, and with Cardiff Philharmonic James has given wonderful performances, most notably of the virtuoso piano part of Manuel de Falla's El Amor Brujo. Promoting and raising the profile of music making in the community to the highest standards, and supporting ensembles throughout South Wales, is what has made James so admired and loved by his fellow musicians. Audiences have benefited immeasurably from James's enthusiasm in presenting programmes that display his eclectic musical taste.

From Stephen Broom ARAM, MD Gwent Chamber Orchestra, ex-Principal Viola Royal Opera House

It's been a pleasure working with James Joseph as keyboard continuo player and organist with the Gwent Chamber Orchestra. His musical and stylish playing has been much appreciated by the members of the GCO and has made my job as conductor that much easier; always sensitive to the music and with a depth of musical knowledge that he wears lightly but with telling effect, his contributions to our performances have been immense. In addition, his willingness to help in all practical ways from helping source music to putting out chairs for rehearsals bears witness to what a genuinely nice chap he is and his commitment to music making in all forms. In addition I've had the pleasure of playing viola sonatas by Brahms and Shostakovich with James, who tackled these fiendishly difficult piano parts with great technical ability and a fine understanding of the various musical styles.

From Tianyi Lu, MD St. Woolo's Sinfonia, Assistant Conductor Melbourne Symphony Orchestra

James is one of the most generous and versatile human beings I have had the pleasure to meet.. [and] ..has played the harpsichord, timpani and triangle with such dedication and musicianship, whilst always being dressed in the most elegant way (!). Typically, he also came to the rescue

when the Cardiff University Opera Society needed a continuo player for our production of Purcell's Fairy Queen on absolutely last minute notice, saving the show. He has been an incredibly inspiring individual for myself and for so many.

From Jeannette Massochi ARAM, National Eisteddfod Accompanist, Senior Lecturer RWCMD, Founder of St. Woolos Sinfonia

I have had the good experience of playing piano duets with James, ...romping through classical, romantic, modern and jazz repertoire – so rewarding. He and I have shared the platform on many occasions at concerts with the St. Woolos Sinfonia. We also enjoyed our annual Abergavenny Eisteddfod where we shared the various competitions both vocal and instrumental. James is a natural gifted musician accomplished in so many skills, and so knowledgeable and he is always so generous not only with his discerning comments and praise but also as an artist who gives not takes – always encouraging. I know of no one more deserving of an award than James, and I trust he will be favourably considered.

From Teslin Davies, Mayor of Abergavenny

Abergavenny Music was so much a part of the town. My large extended family has a tradition involving singing of traditional songs and the playing of various instruments. The shop was a place that you could go to and research any song - James was never phased by any request however obscure, and would always go out of his way to get anything musical for his customers. His enthusiasm and delight in music of all genres was felt by everyone. There are some people in life who inspire others almost unintentionally and James is one of those people and thoroughly deserves to receive recognition for his contribution to music.

From Vaughan Bennett on behalf of Gwent Bach Society

James has had a long relationship with GBS dating back some 25 years or more.... He was a very useful bass who gravitated to being accompanist. Two memorable occasions are Brahms Requiem for choir and two pianos, and Rossini Petite Messe Solenne for piano and harmonium. James was the organist(!) on an original harmonium instrument. He was most unassuming but would quietly bring his musicianship and extensive knowledge to the fore for the benefit of the Choir.

From Lionel Elton, Chair of Abergavenny Chamber Music

In all of my dealings with James I found him to be generous, kind and with an amazing musical awareness. His music shop which served the local as well as a much wider musical community so well, was much more than a place where one could buy music et al. It was a cathedral of music offerings which was available to all. He was one of the key founder members of Abergavenny Chamber Music, and his illness is a great loss to the community.

From Janet Foster, President of the Brecknock Sinfonia Trust

James was a very valuable member of our orchestra and a Member of the Trust who has always been very generous with both his time and his donations. We have had many fund raising evenings when small groups of our instrumentalists have performed and James has accompanied them. Thanks to him our funds have been boosted and we have encouraged many more people to be Members. A visit to Abergavenny Music was a sheer joy. It was not so much a business but a meeting place for the local musicians. James is a wonderful supporter of all the local music organisations. A completely unostentatious person who liked to slip into the background and say ("I am only a back room boy"). If anyone is deserving of an award it is James Joseph.

From Iestyn Harding

I have had the great pleasure of knowing James since the early days of Abergavenny Music when

he would furnish an earnest music student with recordings, scores and all manner of musical paraphernalia to aid my studies and satisfy my burgeoning musical curiosities. As I developed as a composer, visits would include lengthy discussions and I will forever be grateful for his enthusiasm, encouragement and thoughts which always sparked renewed vigour in my efforts.

From Gillian Stevens

I teach cello and he has many times accompanied my pupils as they performed for one another and their families. He would leave his work at the shop early to do this, refusing payment or even a bottle of wine! He was an excellent accompanist and sight-reader. This gave them an invaluable first experience of performing in a supportive atmosphere. I know he also encouraged some of my young pupils with informal playing of sonatas in his home and introducing them to the piano trio repertoire. The shop was an invaluable resource for myself and pupils alike. James offered Saturday jobs to musical 6th formers who could listen to a wide range of music in the shop and get to know about composers and their works, while earning some money. Local musicians could rely on James to keep a stock of their CDs on the shelves. This was an enormous encouragement in these days when professional musicians struggle to get their work 'out there'.

From Ian Heppenstall

James' musical ability requires no further endorsement. But it is his unstoppable enthusiasm and inspiration which should earn him this wonderful award. One of many exemplar moments – he rang me to ask if I would join him two days later in the percussion section for a performance of 'The Planets' with Abergavenny Symphony orchestra. I had to say 'yes' despite never ever having lifted a drumstick before, but with his guidance it all worked out. A top level musician, so gentlemanly and so self-effacing is a rare thing.

From Sue Rogers

James is a true champion of music. In his shop he was continuously introducing us to new music through the discs he played and he was always helpful with suggestions for new repertoire to play. I also knew him as a thoroughly musical, accomplished, supportive chamber pianist. Latterly he found great enjoyment playing percussion in our symphony orchestra, but though he organised the section he unselfishly ensured everyone got something interesting to play.

From John Searight

This cultural oasis was quite something. I remember meeting a number of eminent musicians there, including Vernon Handley, Paul Watkins and Rachel Podger, who turned up with her violin to entertain the customers! When I was deeply involved in writing my biography of Gustav Mahler he was a constant source of encouragement, and his shop was the first to stock copies of the book. A fine musician himself, he has always done his utmost to teach and encourage other musicians, especially youngsters, as well as promoting many local music groups and events.

From Rohan Lewis

Arriving in Abergavenny and missing my old home I went into the shop to ask about any amateur orchestras in the area. I was immediately made to feel welcome and began to feel at home. There was just an atmosphere of calm, friendliness, love of music and people and wanting to help, however ridiculous the request. His free notice board for musical requirements or advertisements and the regular cups of coffee around the back were all part of the shop's appeal. It went well beyond a normal shop creating links when people were needed to play in a concert for example. James did more for local amateur music anyone I can think of and there are many very talented musicians in the area. James helped them all.

--- APOLOGIES TO THOSE I'VE HAD TO LEAVE OUT FOR LACK OF SPACE ---