

A report on the Meet Me trip to the LSO at St Luke's (17/11)

The day started in the cafe of the Albany. The people I was with did not seem to know what we were going to see, and once they knew they did not seem to know a lot about that kind of music. However, none of this mattered as they were very excited to hear new music and see a new place.

The group that I travelled to St John's with had a very pleasant journey. We spoke as a group about the music we were about to hear, particularly about the usual connotations of a harp and how the programme featured music that might subvert these connotations. Much of the music was inspired by tango music, and the harp was played in a way that was very reminiscent of a guitar. I think it was useful to consider the classical concert in this way, as a way of opening out the experience to people that could possibly feel alienated from it.



Performance space at St Luke's

Naturally, with a group like this, there was a lot of discussion about different memories that were brought up by the music and the trip. Lots of people spoke of memories related to music and other concerts they have been too. Frank mentioned watching the music at the Cenotaph on

Remembrance Sunday. Joan spoke about going to concerts at Blackheath Hall, as well as watching ballet on the television in her neighbours house as a child. Jean spoke about how she liked all music, and has always sung in choirs all her life. She particularly mentioned the community that is formed around a church choir, and in a church in general. Everyone that I spoke to related music to a community, or social space, be that on a national scale, in Frank's case, or a much more local scale. Music seems to have this quality of bringing people together



LSO at St Luke's

and I think that is particularly apparent at the Albany, where a community has been built around the choir and other activities so successfully.

I was surprised the event offered me a chance to reflect on my own home and memories (not very strenuous given that I only left Birmingham 3 years ago). Pauline has family very close to where I grew up so we shared that connection and could reflect on this together. This trip very successfully brought out these connections and allowed everyone in the group to reflect very well.

In the taxi on the way home Theresa, Frank and I were taught about Caribbean remedies by Pauline, Barbara and Lecreta. We learnt about what natural products that grow in the region could do for you when suffering from different ailments. There was a great sense of sharing to the day, where everyone, volunteers and members alike could learn something.

One particular memory that felt poignant to the day was of Pauline's aunt, who used to play the harp in church when Pauline was growing up in Jamaica. It sounded like Pauline had not thought about this for a while, and it was amazing to see how an event like this can connect with people and their memories across different cultures and countries. In a way the cross cultural nature of the programme seemed to allude to this but it was even more apparent amongst the people that form the Meet Me group.



A painting of St Luke's by L. S. Lowry

The concert itself was very enjoyable and all of the responses from people in the group were extremely positive. I think the format of the performance helped people who were not familiar with the music to enjoy themselves. A presenter gave programme notes between pieces, which not only broke up the sometimes oppressive silence of a concert hall, but also gave people a focus of what to listen out for during the pieces. It was lovely to see people enjoying this music that can (rightly or wrongly) be thought of as alienating and elitist.

Following the music, most people seemed to be more relaxed and more talkative. Ted was taking a particular interest in the Gamelan that was being set up in the hall for the next concert. He was in a great mood and was singing the old song *Tennessee Waltz* as we were leaving, much to the enjoyment of the LSO staff! Frank, who had been quite quiet before the concert was also much more conversational and positive after hearing the music.

There was an issue with the transport for one of the groups on the way to the concert, which made them miss a lot of the music. It sounds like it was an issue with the driver. This might not be the purpose of this report, as I do not think there were any issues with any of the organisation by Meet Me or any of the volunteers, and none of the members seemed to blame anyone except the driver. I know that Tom spoke to Joan about the issue on the day so I am sure it is being dealt with. It was unfortunate because Joan seemed quite upset by it and Ted said it might put him off coming to things like this again. He was very enthusiastic about the music that he did get to see, so I doubt the experience put off him completely. Having said this, I think music, especially classical music with its sense of grandeur and sometimes complex etiquette, needs to be made as accessible as possible. Again, I don't think was an issue with the organisation of the event but worth considering if we want more people in Meet Me to access these positive trips and experiences. The experience was so positive in bringing people out of themselves that it would be a shame for logistics to limit access to it.

I was struck by a painting of the building by Lowry that was just outside the cafe. Unfortunately I only spotted it as the party was leaving so was unable to show any of the members. I remember studying Lowry in school, as a lot of people do, so his work gives me a sense of memory and time passing, which I think is also inherent in its subject matter of industrial England. It felt very relevant to the trip. It was a great place and event where we could reflect, remember, and build new memories with this community.

To go with this report, I have written a piece to accompany the Lowry painting. A lot of my work as a musician deals in repetition and its relationship to the performer. Through repetition, I have tried to reflect the meditative and indeed reflective nature of the day and how it brought up so many memories, as well as created them. The piece samples Camille Saint-Saëns' *Fantaisie for Violin and Harp* Op 124, a piece that we heard played that day, with a flute instead of the violin.