

STANDPOINT.

Thursday 17th June 2010
A Boy Called Alex: EXCLUSIVE!

You remember Alex Stobbs, the young musician who featured in the Channel 4 documentary *A Boy Called Alex* and the follow-up *A Passion for Life*? The films traced his determination, despite suffering cystic fibrosis, to conduct first Bach's *Magnificat* and then the *St Matthew Passion*. I also recommend [his book](#), which makes harrowing yet inspiring reading. He's studying music at Cambridge now and on Saturday he will be conducting a choral programme of Parry, Mozart, Schumann and Bach in King's College Chapel. It's been touch-and-go since he has only just come out of hospital after a bad bout of illness, but his devotion to his music remains undimmed. With a little help from my friends, I'm pleased to present an exclusive JDCMB/Standpoint e-interview with him.



Q: Alex, why did you decide to put this concert on?

AS: I realised that growing up I have been very fortunate to know some extremely talented young musicians, from my time as a chorister at King's, as a music scholar at Eton and my return to King's as a choral scholar, and simply wanted to pool that talent to play some exciting music, which perhaps doesn't get performed as often as it should. Nick Robinson (Headmaster of King's College School, Cambridge where I was a chorister) is chairman of Future Talent, has been a fantastic help in organising the concert - I have to work for my degree, after all!

Q: What was the idea behind the programme? (My soul, there is a country - Parry; An die sterne - Schumann; Lord, let me know mine end - Parry; Symphony No. 35 - Mozart; Cantata 201 "The Contest Between Phoebus and Pan" - Bach)

AS: Singing his music at King's and at Eton, it was very easy to fall in love with the splendour of Parry's choral music. The two motets of his I will conduct are two of my favourite works of Parry, with the second in particular an incredible example of harmonic development.

The two Parry motets are separated by a Schumann work, taken from his Op. 141, a collection of four secular double choir motets. 2010 is the 200th anniversary of the birth of Schumann and although I am very familiar with his lieder and instrumental works, before recently I didn't know anything about his choral output. So after browsing and listening for a while, I came across this exquisite collection, and it was the first of the four that really left an impression on me. I am very lucky to know many very good singers in Cambridge and elsewhere, so although this piece will be new for most of them, I am confident they will enjoy it as much as I do. Following that the Mozart was quite an easy choice - I am familiar with it since I conducted part of it in a concert at the RNCM two years ago, and have been dying to perform it in its entirety ever since!

The Bach I studied this year during the course of my degree, and as it's one of the most operatic of his cantata output, and not one I previously knew, I felt I should take up the challenge.

Generally the programme contains no piece that is regularly performed - if this concert is as enjoyable and successful as I hope it will be, I mix old with new in future concerts by commissioning friends to compose works for such performances. Hopefully next year I'll do one concert a term at least, for charity or just for the pleasure of rehearsing and performing engaging music! Of course every concert gives me experience in directing and conducting, which I've enjoyed since the age of 14 - but ultimately whilst I'm at Cambridge, my degree comes first.

Q: How does your current state of health affect the way you feel about the concert?

AS: I came out of hospital on Friday (11th June) so I'm not on tip-top form, but I'm still incredibly excited about the concert. My doctors let me out on the condition that I finish a two week course of IV's (intravenous antibiotics) at King's. Hopefully there will be no further hiccups!

The concert is at King's College, Cambridge, on Saturday 19 June, 7.30pm. Tickets: phone King's on 01223 365 814, £30, £25, £20 and £10. Proceeds go to Future Talent and the Cystic Fibrosis Trust.

Tags:

[Alex Stobbs](#)

Harry Jacques

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8:06 PM

Thank you so much for highlighting this concert, which seems to have gone unnoticed elsewhere. I saw the 'Boy Called Alex' documentaries on Channel 4 and also bought his fascinating book - what an inspiring young man and musician is Alex Stobbs. A friend heard him in a piano recital some time ago and spoke of his great talents. Conductor, pianist and now impresario - I wish him every success and am sure those who can get to King's Cambridge on Saturday are in for a treat. Harry