

Annemarie Federle



Many of you will have watched Annemarie's wonderful performances in the **BBC Young Musician** competition. With a bright future ahead, she tells **Richard Steggall** about playing the Gipps *Horn Concerto* and her route to the final.

I have to start by saying a huge congratulations from the BHS and horn players around the world.

Thank you!

Those that are regular BBC Young Musician viewers may remember you from the 2018 competition.

Yes, this was the second time that I entered – in 2018 I made it to the brass final. Back then, I only applied because I thought, “what have I got to lose?” and I was just glad to have some audition and performance experience. When I got to the category final I was really surprised, but I learnt so much from it and really enjoyed it.

Were you thinking you could go further two years later?

I always thought that I would apply again, yes. I knew that I would be young enough to do it again, so I thought I might as well have another go and see how far I get.

This time you got all the way to the grand final. How did you make your concerto choice?

I'd discovered the Ruth Gipps concerto after buying David Pyatt's *British Horn Concertos* CD because I wanted to listen to the Gordon Jacob concerto. That was the first time that I heard the Gipps and I remember thinking that it sounded quite hard but that it was a great piece. I think Richard Watkins once suggested it in a lesson, so I bought the music and had a go. When it came round to picking a concerto, I didn't really want to pick Strauss *Horn Concerto No. 2* which often seems like the default

choice for horn players. I wanted something a bit different to stand out from any violinists' or pianists' repertoire – maybe something a bit more technically challenging and slightly more modern. The Gipps is modern but also has great lines and melodies that are so idiomatic for the horn. It also has an incredible relationship between the orchestra and the solo horn; there is so much dialogue between the wind instruments which gives it a very distinctive, rather impressionistic texture. Every time you listen to it or play it, you hear something that you didn't notice before, whether that be a countermelody, or a new way of linking different motifs.

Lots of non-horn players don't quite realise how difficult it is. All the challenging passages are there because they sound nice and because that's how the music is supposed to go, not for the sake of being difficult. The work comes across as being accessible, but it's actually quite hard!

You won't get any arguments here. Didn't David Pyatt say it was the hardest piece he has ever recorded?

Yes, in fact, I don't think he's ever played it live because it's not often requested but it's also a risky piece to play.

David was 19 when he recorded it, and Ben Goldscheider's just recorded it at 23 – it's obviously for the young and fearless!

How important to you is it that you are championing the work of a female composer?

I didn't pick it for the sake of having a female composer, but I

definitely think the reason that the concerto (along with the rest of her music) is not as well known as it should be, is that she faced a lot of discrimination as a female composer. This, as well as the fact that it is beautiful music, gave me all the more reason to pick it. I was pleased to be able to give the piece a little more recognition and I really hope I can continue to do so in the future.

How was the occasion? With no audience did it feel like an occasion?

All of us have had very little performing experience over the last year, so if I had gone from that, to performing to a packed hall, it would have been quite a shock. We've had a couple of concerts at the Royal Academy of Music with just ten or twenty people spread apart – even if it's just a few people, it's enough to make it feel like a concert. When we're all in concert clothes, it feels like a performance anyway, so in fact I didn't mind too much not having a proper audience. In the hall, the panel was there, as well as a couple of parents hiding in the corner and then all the BBC tech people; it was enough to make it feel like an audience.

The whole experience leading up to the final was also very exciting and rewarding. I really enjoyed rehearsing with the orchestra and with Mark Wigglesworth – playing with a professional orchestra for the first time is definitely an indescribable feeling.

Is that the first time you'd played the Gipps with an orchestra?

Yes. I had done two or three rehearsals with my school orchestra on the first movement back in March last year, but the concert obviously got cancelled.

Which school is that?

Hills Road Sixth Form College in Cambridge. We are lucky in Cambridge as there are a lot of academics. Results-wise my school was one of the best state sixth forms in the country. I was at Chesterton Community College before that.

Are your parents musical?

My parents both play the violin as a hobby – my Dad actually studied music. He's a biologist now but I always grew up with music around me so it felt very natural to start an instrument.

Was the horn the first instrument you started?

I started on the piano when I was about 6 and then took up the horn when I was 7. I initially learnt with Christian Rutherford privately, before briefly having Richard Kennedy and Sue Dent. I started lessons with Richard Watkins at the age of 13, and he has taught me ever since.

What is it you like about Richard?

He's obviously an incredible player and also an incredible teacher. He's very encouraging and I like the fact that he doesn't focus on the specific physics of playing the horn but on musicality, so

Name: Annemarie Federle

Age started horn: 7

First instrument: I can't remember – some kind of single F Kinderhorn!

Current instrument: Alexander 103

Favourite composer for horn: Schumann or Mahler

Favourite composer to listen to: This changes frequently – at the moment I'd say Tchaikovsky or Bach.

Horn hero: My teachers!

Hobbies: Cooking and baking, cycling and going on walks, board games, spending time with my friends

Fun fact: On one of my NYO courses, I played in all three concerts without realising I had a disposable foam earplug stuck up my bell. I remember thinking my horn felt weirdly resistant and out of tune but didn't think anything of it until after the course...!

the technique comes as a result of that. That makes the music always the number-one priority which I think is really important.

I remember when I first started having lessons with him, he strongly encouraged me to use the Arban *Cornet Method* book which really pushed my technique on a lot, through doing those exercises.

You were principal horn in the National Youth Orchestra for a while.

Yes. I joined when I was 14, starting on 7th horn (my first BBC Prom was Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, so that put me on first Wagner tuba!), so it was quite a shock when I moved to principal horn in the next year. I played principal for two years.

Were you in any other youth groups?

I took part in ensembles from quite early on: I played in lots of local groups, such as the Bedfordshire Youth Orchestra, Cambridge Holiday Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia Academy and a brass dectet called Junior Prime Brass that I was in until I left school. I was also a member of Aldeburgh Young Musicians, where I met the composer Will Harmer, who wrote a piece for me that I played in the Young Musician Brass Final.

How did you choose the brass final programme? [The same programme as in the semi-finals.]

I wanted to keep the structure of the programme I had in 2018 – starting with an unaccompanied piece, followed by a lyrical piece and finishing with a more showy piece that incorporated an element of chamber music. I commissioned Will to write me an unaccompanied piece, so that gave me a piece that was very suited to me and what I wanted to show. Then I wanted to have some standards of the horn repertoire to complement that, so I chose Franz Strauss's *Nocturno*, which is one of my favourite pieces, and is always a good piece to show the warm lyrical horn sound. I thought about the last piece for quite a while because I

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was considering doing just the Allegro from Schumann's *Adagio and Allegro*, but wondered if it would be too controversial not to have the Adagio with it. I considered other last movements of sonatas but settled on the Schumann because it was the best showy end-piece and I think it complemented the other pieces very well.

I think it works for a competition but you wouldn't necessarily play it on its own in a concert.

Definitely. Lots of horn players might think it's a crime to play the Allegro without the Adagio. But it made sense in the programme as they only show excerpts on the TV programme anyway. I could have played the Adagio instead of the *Nocturno*, but I liked having three different pieces to show my breadth as a horn player.

Do you think your playing has developed between the semi-final and the final? [Because of COVID they were actually a year apart.]

Yes, definitely. I didn't think I'd improved that much but I hadn't heard any of the semifinal broadcast until it was recently aired – it was really interesting comparing my playing a year apart. When you are focusing on the details when you are practising, it's sometimes hard to see the bigger picture of how you've improved. I didn't realise it was that much. I remember thinking that the semi-final went quite well, but listening back to it a year later, there were definitely a few bits that... er... I wasn't too sure about. Comparing it to the final, I was really pleased with the improvement.

Between the semi and the final, you've started at the Royal Academy of Music. Did you always want to do music?

During the last few years of school, yes, I was quite certain that's what I wanted to do. I think joining and playing in NYO was the point that I realised that that was what I really enjoyed doing.

I expect that you haven't done much large-scale work at RAM?

No, unfortunately not, but we have had regular ensemble playing. I hope we can do more larger orchestral playing soon.

You also have David Pyatt as a teacher now. Is he a similar teacher to Richard?

He does things differently – he is very systematic in the way he



Annemarie with the 2020 BBC Young Musician Brass Category Prize (all photos courtesy of the BBC)

teaches, and gives me loads of stuff to work on including lots of studies. The studies are particularly good for my low playing – that's one of the biggest differences between my playing a year ago and now. My low playing has improved quite a lot, although there's definitely still work to do!

What do you like to do apart from playing the horn?

I live in university halls near Kings Cross now, which is a 20-minute walk to RAM. It's self-catered flats, so I'm really into cooking and baking. I also love socialising with my flatmates – we have games nights, for example, with the eleven or twelve students that are living there at the moment.

I assume you now see yourself as a first horn player?

Well, definitely a high player.

We've all heard your pedal notes now in the Gipps!

No, definitely a high player!

What are your ambitions?

I'd definitely like to play in an orchestra at some point, that's a goal. Having a balance of solo, chamber and orchestral playing would be great – I'll just see what happens.

And I'm sure we are all looking forward to seeing what happens as well... RS