

ARTS

If you have a story to tell, get in touch with Shaun Shackleton on 240210 or email sshackleton@guernseypress.com

OUT THERE

Improbables, The Musical



HOT on the heels of their second birthday celebrations, Guernsey Improbables are launching their own Improbables – the Improvised Comedy Musical. Tonight their usual Improv Comedy Mania will take place in the form of 'Fluff or Forfeit' at the Fermain Tavern.

Then on Sunday, for the first time ever, they will be performing a full improvised comedy musical at the same venue. On stage will be Sarah Hansmann, Oliver Davies, Dave Hyett, Caitlin Sullivan, Harriet Billington and Lydia Pugh, who will be making up the songs on the spot accompanied by 'musical genius' Ricky Long.

● Shows start at 8pm. Tickets are £6 for each show, available from www.improguernsey.com.

A classical Christmas



The Guernsey Chamber Choir and Orchestra.

FANS of classical music are in for a treat over the next week as two local ensembles play at St James.

On Friday and Saturday the Guernsey Choral and Orchestral Society take to the stage. This year the concert includes the inaugural performance of the newly formed GCOS Children's Choir, 50 voices trained by the society's conductor, Alan Gough.

Marking the conductor's return after 18 years will be a performance of Haydn's Harmonie Mass. This is the composer at his very best, offering a mixture of expressive, uplifting and joyful music. The second half is full of Christmas joy and includes Fantasia on Christmas Carols by Vaughn Williams and Walking in the Air from The Snowman. Soloists are Deborah Bideau, Olivia Warburton, Richard Dowling and Malachy Frame.

● Tickets are £14, £6 students and restricted view. Sponsored by DHL, Guernsey Freight Services.

On Tuesday it's the turn of Guernsey Chamber Choir and Orchestra, for the concert hall's last performance of 2014. And what a finale it is. The choir will be debuting a new commission by talented local composer Chris Claxton depicting the Annunciation, Advent and Birth of Christ, all with beautiful orchestration. The concert promises to leave the audience anticipating the oncoming festivities.

● Tickets are £12, £7 students and restricted view. Tickets for each concert, both of which start at 7.30pm, are available online from www.guernseytickets.gg and the box office on 711361.



'My need for music gets stronger'

World-class conductor Peter Stark has a passion for sharing the joy of music with younger generations. **Shaun Shackleton** found out what draws him to the baton – and why he's had to give up on the bow

'WORKING with young musicians is rejuvenating,' world renowned conductor Peter Stark said.

'It keeps me young.' Peter has been visiting Guernsey for 28 years, and part of the draw has been working with local music students. 'I've been over for both professional reasons and for pleasure,' he explained. 'I've been to conduct the Guernsey Symphony Orchestra, for holidays and to the Ladies' College two years ago.' On his most recent visit he was sharing his knowledge and passion with youngsters at Elizabeth College, with great success.

'I was meant to have half an hour with him, but it spun into an hour,' said student, trombone player and CCF member Fraser Wilkes, 16. 'He is so clever – a genius at music. He has such understanding and experience and he passed it on to me.'

'I want to join the Royal Marines as a musician and we talked about what I need to do. He then watched

me conduct our music class, to see if I could improve. It was brilliant.' Fraser has played with the Guernsey Jazz Orchestra, Guernsey Concert Brass and the Music Centre under the batons of Alan West, Tim Wright and the late Simon Applegate.

'They are all great conductors, but Peter added another level.'

To anyone who loves music, Peter's list of accolades is jaw-dropping. He is professor of conducting at London's Royal College of Music, holds the posts of rehearsal director to the European Union Youth Orchestra and principal conductor of the Cambridge University Chamber Orchestra. Between 1985 and 2010 he was conductor in residence to the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, series consultant to the BBC television series Maestro in 2008 and is currently writing the first of two books based on his experiences as a conductor and educationalist.

Music has always been a big part of Peter's life. As a violinist he began studying under Leonard Hirsch in 1973.

'I studied at the Royal College of Music and then played professionally for 10 years with the orchestra of the Welsh National Opera and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. I hung up my bow in 1980.'

He went on to conduct a Who's Who of world orchestras, including the Berlin Symphony, the Malaysian Philharmonic and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

The change from playing to conducting signalled a massive change for Peter.

'It was a huge, huge event in my life in 1987 that made me want to take the plunge.'

He didn't expand, except to say that 'my world exploded'.

'I prefer the process rather than the product,' he revealed. 'I love rehearsal, the connection with the musicians.'

Of course there's a connection when you're playing with other musicians, but it's not the same as being a conductor.

I'm fascinated with that relationship, how it crosses over in life in every possible way.

'Headmaster, bishop, conductor – we have the same issues. It's all about encouraging, not insisting. It's the job of the conductor to draw out the best.'

Along with the many other high points in Peter's CV, he has been assistant to such greats as Lord Menuhin and Sir Simon Rattle.

But there's one aspect of his work in which he reveals.

'By chance I became involved in working with young musicians. I love their enthusiasm. It's like a Cider With Rosie moment. The first time you have anything – like Cider With Rosie – the experience, that stays with you for the rest of your life.'

He talked about how good it was to come to Guernsey, meeting and talking to young musicians.

'Fraser was specific about conducting in the Marines. I think that's exactly the right thing for him.'

Working as a consultant on the BBC show Maestro, where he mentored eight celebrities, was 'the best and the worst' time of his life.

'Peter Snow was the worst. The guy can't count up to four. We brought in a marching band to help his timing and he couldn't physically do it.'

'The best was the winner, Sue Perkins. She was musical.'

Unfortunately, Peter doesn't play any more. 'I still have all my violins and bows but I have arthritis. It's awful. I can't make a sound any more, I just end up cuddling the violin.'

But he still listens to music? 'Oh God and how. I will never stop. My need for music gets stronger.'

'I love rehearsal, the connection with the musicians. Of course there's a connection when you're playing with other musicians, but it's not the same as being a conductor'

Conductor Peter Stark