



Chichester Festival for Music, Dance and Speech 2026 *Special Report*

Junior Section 31st January

The 71st Chichester Festival for Music, Dance and Speech began with our Junior Guitar Section and we were delighted to welcome CFMDS Chairman, Alan Rodger, to give the opening address:

“It is wonderful to see so many familiar faces and new talents gathered here today. As we begin this year's competition, we do so with hearts that are both full of music and a little heavy with remembrance. This year's festival is particularly poignant as we honour the memory of Sasha Levtoy, who passed away this past October. Sasha was a cornerstone of our Festival committee for many decades and served as the devoted leader of the Classical Guitar section. His boundless enthusiasm was infectious, and his life's work was defined by an unwavering commitment to nurturing musical talent at every level – from the youngest beginner to the seasoned professional. His legacy is etched into the very fabric of our musical community, and while his presence is deeply missed, his spirit resonates in every performance held within these walls.

I must also express the sincere appreciation to Nina Levtoy and her family and friends. Their tireless efforts to ensure the continued operation of the Regis School of Music have been vital. It is through their enduring grace and generosity that the Festival is once again permitted to use this magnificent recital hall for our Guitar, Strings, and Piano sections. We are honoured to be guests in a space that continues to serve as a beacon for classical music in Bognor Regis. Finally, the continuation of this section has been made possible by the remarkable community spirit of the West Sussex Guitar Club. We, the organising committee, owe a significant debt of gratitude to Linda Kelsall-Barnett and her colleagues, who have stepped forward with great professionalism to manage the 2026 Classical Guitar section. Their dedication ensures that the high standards established by Sasha will be upheld for this generation of performers”.



The new Guitar Section Leader, Linda Kelsall-Barnett, then welcomed our adjudicator, 'the queen of guitar' herself, Amanda Cook. Amanda first performed in this festival aged 7 when her teacher was of course Sasha. He would have been delighted then to see nine children in the first Solo Novice Class (Age 10 and Under). A piece called 'Regular Reggae' (by Derek Hasted) seemed very popular and Amanda commented that it was occurring so *regularly* that it was almost like a set piece. 'I can see why you all like it', she added. Amanda thanked the young performers for all playing so beautifully and for getting up so early in the morning. For some it was their first time on a big stage and she said they looked like they were enjoying it even if they weren't! Amanda was impressed with the excellent walking fingers and the projection into a big room but they could now just add some dynamics.

Amanda gave all the young competitors very helpful tips and advice including 'look out at the audience to announce the piece before thinking about the speed and volume, count in your head before you play the first bar which helps you come in cleanly, push into the sting rather than pulling up to get a warmer sound, make sure that the ending feels like an ending and look up, give a smile which is really nice for the audience even if you don't feel like it'. For the older competitors Amanda suggested listening to recordings of the pieces they are playing to form their own opinions but also to start recording their own playing.





The Solo Age 12 to 15 Class was won by Athalai Leney and she was awarded the Adrian Dennis Cup which had Amanda's name on it in 1987 and 1988. Amanda gave a special mention to Millie Malcolm who played with one bandaged finger and Torrin Ayling for playing in the family class with her dad Jim. Amanda also commended Ariella Sheridan who won four trophies! Another highlight were the duets from Ariella and Linda - the beautiful *Dream Catcher* and the exciting *Machinha de Carnaval*. The last performer of the day was Seth Morgan in the Intermediate Recital Class. Incredibly, two of his false nails flew off in the first bar but like a true professional Seth did not miss a beat! Linda thanked Seth for finishing the day with a lovely piece by Villa-Lobos, one of the hardest pieces in the guitar repertoire.



Adult Section 1st February

The final leg of the Festival was the Adult Guitar Section, held on a wet Sunday morning. All involved managed to overcome the trials and tribulations of the weekend; an attempted break-in on Friday evening and David Clarke having to save the day on Saturday with his mobile phone payment app after the Chichester Festival mobile had failed. So when club members arrived to the wailing sounds of the RSM's alarm and club chairman Julian Bobak asking if the code had been changed, all wondered what else could go wrong! But the arrival of Amanda Cook brought an air of calm and reassurance and the day started with Guitar Harmony. The ensemble comprised ten players with Juliet Robinson standing in on bass guitar, and Andrew playing dual role of conductor and player, while also suffering from a heavy cold. They gave an excellent performance of Andrew's arrangements; *Sailing*, *La Bamba*, *The Lord is my Shepherd* and, as a challenge, Simon and Garfunkel's *Sound of Silence*. Amanda awarded them Honours commenting on how the sound produced was warm and well-blended but with all parts clearly audible. The resounding applause from the audience showed how this ensemble just keeps on improving.



West Sussex Guitar Orchestra, directed and conducted by Linda Kelsall-Barnett, followed with Pachelbel's *Canon*, *Nebulae* by Olga Amelkina-Vera and *Cateretê* and *Xote* by Machado. Linda was eager for the orchestra to tackle the rhythmically tricky *Nebulae*, encouraged to do so by Amanda at last summer's West Dean Guitar Festival. The orchestra were nervous but the hours of practice paid dividends and the unprompted smiles at the end of their performance spoke volumes. Amanda's feedback 'lovely layering of each entry and a natural build up of texture in the Pachelbel, a good build up of energy in the *Nebulae* but

emphasise the beats more, and to be more brash and humorous in *Cateretê* and *Xote'*. WSGO were delighted to be awarded an Outstanding certificate.



Paul Nowlan played *Andante* by Sor and *Greensleeves* in the Late Starter's Class and gave a performance belying his mere two years' experience. The Solo Intermediate Class started with David Alexander's two evocative compositions; *One Minute to Midnight* and *Night Passage*, followed by Harri Goldsmith with Paganini's *Sonata* and *Country Etude* by Tatiana Stachak. Teresa Henley played Tarrega's *Lagrima* and *Skaters Waltz* by Robin Pearson and then, fully warmed up, she was joined by Baz Boxall to delight us with *Totem* and *Drifting* by Richard Charlton in the Duet Class. Amanda's advice for all three classes was 'don't always start at the beginning when

practising, don't play to your heartbeat and, most importantly, remember to breathe!'

The New Gala Quartet performed three of Debbie Burford's arrangements. Leroy Anderson's *Plink, Plank, Plunk!* brought much humour to the afternoon. Debbie said that 'They all hated it' which was rebuked by Diana Green saying that she 'Just didn't like pizzicato'. They also performed the appropriately titled '*Deborah's Theme*' by Ennio Morricone and the resounding applause said it all for the quality of the arrangements and also their performance.



There were fewer entries in the more advanced classes, as some entrants had had to withdraw. Congratulations to George Vears for his performance of Sor's *Study op.6 no.1* and the fiendishly difficult *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*. He then performed Bach's *Prelude 999*, adding the prefix BWV afterwards to denote that it was not an emergency call! David Clarke then performed *Julia Florida* by Barrios and the scherzo *Les Soirées d'Auteuil* by Napoleon Coste, with his introduction 'Excuse my French' which made everyone smile. Richard Prior, chairman of WSGC from 1994 to 2005, had travelled from Devon to play in the festival and really saved the day by performing in three classes, borrowing Joanna Wellwood-Froud's beautiful Stephen Eden guitar to do so. He gave a

wonderful rendition of Bach's *Air on a G String* and *Study no.5* by Maximo Diego Pujol and finished with Leo Brouwer's *A Day in November*. He was awarded a medal for his contributions and all were delighted to see Richard again.



The festival ended with Linda Kelsall-Barnett performing David Russell's *The Bucks of Oramore* followed by her own composition *Fair Flower of Northumberland*. Linda was awarded a well-earned trophy and a lengthy round of applause in recognition of the huge amount of hard work that went into organising such a successful festival. As Amanda and Linda were presented with a bouquet of flowers, Nina mentioned that one had fallen away. She placed this single rose in a small vase in front of Sasha's photo near the stage, in memory of him. A big thank you must go to Amanda Cook for her musical pearls of wisdom and encouragement to all our performers in her adjudication. Thanks must also be given to the helpers over the festival weekend - Baz Boxall, David Clarke, Teresa Henley, Debbie Burford, Chris Sweatman, Julian

Bobak and Linda Kelsall-Barnett. 'Good teamwork', said Linda smiling. And finally, we must thank Nina, who is our pillar of support in so many ways. Sasha would have been so proud.

Debbie Burford and Teresa Henley



	Chichester Festival - Junior Classes	Winner
801	<i>Solo Novice, Age 10 & under</i>	Torrin Ayling
820	<i>Parent & Child Duet</i>	Torrin Ayling & Jim Ayling
802	<i>Solo Beginner, Age 11 & under</i>	Laurie Rome
803	<i>Technical perfection I, Age 12 & under</i>	Seren Mathias
803	<i>Solo Novice, Age 13 & under</i>	Oscar Murphy
805	<i>Solo Grade IV & under</i>	Daniel Whitelaw
806	<i>Solo Grade IV & above</i>	Ariella Sheridan
807	<i>Solo, Age 12-15</i>	Athalie Leney
829	<i>Technical Perfection Class 2</i>	Anna Swain
809	<i>Junior Bach Class</i>	Ariella Sheridan
813	<i>Junior Recital Class</i>	Ariella Sheridan
821	<i>Teacher & Child Duet, Age 12 & under</i>	Ariella Sheridan & Linda Kelsall-Barnett
814	<i>Intermediate Recital Class</i>	Seth Morgan

	Chichester Festival - Senior Classes	Winner
846	<i>Adult Orchestra</i>	West Sussex Guitar Orchestra
831	<i>Adult Late Starters</i>	Paul Nowlan
833	<i>Adult Solo Intermediate 2</i>	Teresa Henley
842	<i>Adult Intermediate Duet</i>	Baz Boxall & Teresa Henley
845	<i>Adult Trio or Quartet</i>	New Gala Quartet
839	<i>Adult Arrangers Class</i>	Debbie Burford
834	<i>Adult Solo Advanced Amateur Open</i>	George Vears
837	<i>Adult Solo Bach Class</i>	George Vears
835	<i>Adult Solo Recital Class Open</i>	Linda Kelsall-Barnett (Runner-up Richard Prior)