

# Helping hand rewards talent

Turn to your right, turn to your left and talk to somebody – that's the etiquette at the Wigmore Hall, in London, and there must be many a story to come from those conversations

When Richard Harrison got chatting with violinist Louise Williams, before a lunchtime concert, he was astonished to learn how difficult it was for a musician like her to obtain a suitable instrument.

String players at a conservatoire may be able to borrow a fine instrument during the years of their studies but, after leaving, often find their own is simply inadequate for the concerts, auditions and competitions.

Of course, an instrument of sufficient quality for a professional career is often unaffordable for young players. Music-lover Richard saw an opportunity to

create a charity, providing good-quality instruments for young musicians to borrow.

He started by buying three violins, and now has a collection of 44 fine old Italian, French, Dutch and English violins and one viola, plus five bows.

The Harrison-Frank Family Foundation was set up in 2014 and all the instruments have been acquired in collaboration with violin experts J&A Beare, who has helped to set up, maintain and run the scheme.

Richard said: "We would like to have 60 violins and 20 bows. I am very grateful to Simon Morris at J&A Beare for

the support and ensuring the charity acquires the instruments at good prices. We have an excellent relationship which I really appreciate."

The violins range in value – three are valued at £20,000; 10 at £40,000 and six at £60,000 – and are lent according to each student's ability. They are kept in London by J&A Beare and, once loaned out, have to be returned once a year to ensure the instrument is in good order, re-assessed for insurance purposes and has a passport for overseas travel.

Among the foundation's many successes was the victory for two of its beneficiaries in last year's Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition, where violinists Colin Scobie and George Smith were members of the triumphant Maxwell Quartet.

Colin has been loaned an instrument by Paolo Castello, from Genoa c.1770, and George another by Bernardus Calcanius, Genoa c.1740, and a bow by Albert Nurnberger from 1930.

American-born Richard learned to play the violin at a young age in the USA. He said: "It was the thing that middle-class people did, send their children to music lessons. We lived in a mill town-producing town where my father was a pharmacist and well-connected. I am almost ashamed to say that we lived well during World War II.

"I was sent to grammar school and my life was a far cry from that of my grandparents. They were East European immigrants who arrived in the US



**OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS: Instrument loans for young musicians**



**ONE CHAT LEADS TO CHARITY: Ina Wiczorek, Louise Williams, Richard Harrison and Simon Morris**

"I loved music but I was never going to be a brilliant musician"

with eight children. When I went to their house I could smell the poverty. I knew from a very young age that I never wanted to be in such a position. I wanted to have a secure living and worked really hard from the beginning. I loved music but was never going to be a brilliant musician so I studied business."

In 1962 he moved to Paris, leaving his wife and two children with his mother for two months while he found a job. He said: "I was very ambitious and my career led me to London, where I feel is now home."

Richard, now a naturalised UK citizen, has earned the charity dual status, in the UK and US. Loans are arranged annually, with the option of extending up to five years, until the musician is established and earning enough to think of buying their own violin. The instrument can then be released to lend

again to another qualifying applicant.

Applicants need to be UK citizens or at least planning to stay in England for the next five years, recently graduated or in the last year of college, and aged no more than 30.

After the initial contact, they are asked to send a CV and an mp4 recording or video link showcasing their playing, and may then be invited to an interview.

Successful musicians are obliged to arrange insurance with Lark Music before collecting the instrument from J&A Beare.

The charity expects beneficiaries to provide updates on career developments and invitations, if possible, to any performance they may give in London. Candidates may be asked to play once or twice a year in a charitable event organised by the trust.

Having established the charity, Richard is hoping to put it in safe, new hands, finding an administrator to work with the trustees and oversee matters like tax returns.

Could you be that person? If so please visit [harrisonfrankfoundation.com](http://harrisonfrankfoundation.com) or email [inawiczorek@beares.com](mailto:inawiczorek@beares.com)

## Special event

Richard Harrison has only occasionally met the musicians who borrow his foundation's instruments so Lark Music is arranging a musical evening where the young violinists will play a thank-you concert for Richard.

If you are interested in attending please contact Julie Webb at [julie.webb@astonlark.com](mailto:julie.webb@astonlark.com)