

Jim Peschek - A Life in Music

Jim joined the Music Department in 1950, serving as Assistant Director of Music from 1951 to 1960. He then went on to become Director of Music at Monkton Coombe School but returned to Uppingham, as Director of Music, from 1969 to 1978. He remained a full-time member of the Department until 1985, before taking on the part-time role of Music Department Librarian and Archivist, a position he held until a few years ago. Jim passed away in June, which we were very sorry to report via the Summer edition of 'The Colonnade', after which we received many tributes and recollections from the OU and Uppingham community.



David Crow (SH 57)

I have special memories of Jim Peshek who taught me piano during my time at Uppingham from September 1957. He soon realised that he was never going to turn me into an accomplished pianist but at the same time was able to instil in me a long-lasting love and interest in a wide range of music. When I ventured into attempting the trombone, although not his instrument, he knew of this and then ensured that I was aware of some of the memorable moments for trombone in the classical and wider repertoire.

A wonderfully warm, engaging, interesting and interested man, who was certainly in my case one of the highlights of my time at the School.

Richard Barker (Fgh 71)

I remember him for his perseverance in teaching the rabble of mostly uninterested boys new hymns. Great voice and totally dedicated.

Graham Smallbone (C 47)

I was a music scholar at Uppingham when Jim Peschek joined the staff for the first time, adding to the now well-established tradition of links with King's College, Cambridge, following in the steps of Douglas Guest and Peter Godfrey. His acute sense of humour, passion for choral music and his musicianship were a delight.

Later, when he returned as Director of Music and I was a colleague in other schools, and later still when I returned to Rutland as headmaster of Oakham, we enjoyed occasional meetings and exchange of memories. Jim's inimitable and often wicked sense of humour remained totally undimmed.

David Gavins (LH 73)

I got married in 1986 at the Church of St Andrew, Stoke Dry. I asked Jim to play the organ for the ceremony. He was a little apprehensive because Stoke Dry organ is not the School Chapel or Hall organ; it has half the range and needs someone to pump the air into it using a bellows arm, however he agreed to perform.

He kindly let us know that Widor's Tocatta was not going to happen and guided us to other options. We were fans of the TV series Brideshead Revisited and the music of Geoffrey Burgon - and we asked if the Main Theme could be played when walking up the aisle. He said that he would transpose the music to make it work for us - and even contacted Andrew Webster, a music scholar at the

School, to play the clarinet to hit the high notes that the organ couldn't reach. it was a magical service and I am grateful for his kindness, hardwork and invention.

Richard Brown (B 80)

I am so sorry to hear the very sad news of Jim Peschek's passing and had to share the below memory.

I 'learned' the piano for six years at Spratton Hall School before arriving at Uppingham in 1980 and after one and a half years with Mr. Peschek I still hadn't sat my grade 1 exam.

I arrived late as usual for my lesson one day and he asked me why I was trying to learn the piano. "Because my Mum wants me to", was my reply, "Do you want to?", "Not really", "Do you practise at all or just play cricket?", "Mostly play cricket in all honesty", "OK I suggest you ask your mother if it's OK to terminate your lessons at the end of this term?".

I got the nod from my Mum and informed Mr. Peschek at my next lesson. He agreed that this was for the best but wanted to make my final 4 weeks' lessons worthwhile so he told me that I was going to write my own piece of music and he will enter me in the intermediate piano competition. Really?!

We then wrote '*The Comet Passes*' together after he put a blank piece of white paper in front of me and said we won't be putting down any notes, just the odd chord, narrative, images, arrows up and down etc. It wasn't the most tuneful piece of piano music ever written.....it started with a bit of 'tinkle tinkle' at the top end of the keyboard followed by a few chords going down, getting louder and louder as the comet approached planet Earth, until a very loud banging of the lowest keys as the comet passed by and then a return to the top and a final 'tinkle tinkle....tink' after the comet had disappeared into the cosmos!

Once we were happy with it, I then had to perform it in front of Mr. Allwood and two other judges. I was so nervous but much to everyone's amazement they awarded me with fifth place! My Housemaster Mr. Boston was obviously impressed and insisted that I perform it at the Brooklands House Concert. Oh great! This event was usually only attended by masters and parents in the house dining room, however word got out and pretty much the entire house filed in to hear Brown's first and last composition and all I could hear behind me was sniggering and often quite loud laughter from those who couldn't hold it in.

I think this is a brilliant example of what a great man and awesome teacher Mr. Peschek was and the memory of him playing '*The Comet Passes*' on his harpsichord will stay with me forever! I still perform '*The Comet Passes*' when requested but I can't remember the chords so it's even worse!

RIP Jim Peschek.

Dr, the Hon, Sir David KP Li (H 54)

I remember him very well. He had a real passion for music and inspired me to take up the piano. I enjoyed my lessons with him very much. What an incredible generation of teachers and students we had at Uppingham in those years!

Tributes from Former Staff

Simon and Jeanie Pattinson

Jim was not only a colleague but a very good friend. The connections to us, and also to my parents, go back a very long way... As a young man, he helped my father on the farm at harvest time – must be about 70 years ago!

We send our deepest condolences to his family.

Joe and Jean Wallace

He appointed me to my role as Band Master and Brass teacher at the School in 1975 and I enjoyed eight happy years there. Also my two sons, Duncan and Stewart, were grateful to Jim for his teaching, as they went on to their music degrees at University.

Karin Harman

I'm so very sorry to hear this news. He was a true gentleman and a great Uppingham figure.

Peter Colville

An end to a long, supportive and creative Uppingham History.

Tribute by Ralph Allwood MBE, DMus Director of Music 1978 to 1985

In 1978, when I arrived in Uppingham to take over from Jim, I asked him what he would like to be in charge of, and he replied, without hesitation, "Music Librarian". I could have hugged him. I couldn't believe it. That was bottom of my list! From then on we were the best of friends and have remained so since. I learnt so much from him and it is my joy and privilege to write of him now.

Jim began his musical life as a chorister at All Saints, Margaret Street, now long gone. He must have been the last chorister left who had sung at George VI's coronation. He then went to King's Canterbury before becoming a tenor choral scholar at King's, Cambridge, under Boris Ord. He was the first to sing the tenor solo in the wonderful Collegium Regale of Howells 'Nunc Dimittis', written for King's.

He went to Uppingham to join the Music Staff in 1950, the year I was born. I first heard of him when a friend, Richard Cooke, who also went up as a choral scholar to King's and had been at Monkton Combe under Jim, spoke warmly of him. Richard remembers that Jim's great sense of humour was reflected in the long and loud laugh of Harold Jones, his assistant, which could regularly be heard the full length of the Music School.

Tidiness and cleanliness were an obsession. He couldn't bear to see things out of place, dusty or in a state of disrepair. He once vacuumed my room *while* I was taking an A-level lesson! House pianos, of course, were kept in the house dining room. "The trouble with house pianos is the top C and B don't work and there is marmalade between the A and the G sharp."

He formed a small brigade of boys and girls who, on Social Services afternoons, would join him to carry out little repairs around the school... in association with the Maintenance Department, of course! I have never heard of that in any other school.

Jim's excellent musical influence lives on, his ethos was "Give 'em good music and they'll respond with joy". He produced a list of 'permitted' unison songs for the House Singing and I continued to use the list throughout my tenure. Indeed, I subsequently imported his ideas to Eton and still use some of his masterly congregational arrangements. Paul Spicer told me that when the 1st XV went to France, they were asked by their French opponents to sing something – so they all roared out the Libera Me from Faure's Requiem.

Jim was a proud member of The Royal Society of Musicians for a long time, the charity founded by Handel as 'The fund for decay'd Musicians' (it's tempting to think that it was the title which initially attracted him). Jim was a member of its 'Court of Assistants' - he was especially active in bringing to the Society's notice cases of musicians in serious need of financial support through ill health in old age.

Uppingham's Chaplain, Father James Saunders, told me that when he was priest-in-charge of four small villages in the north of Rutland, Jim – already in his 80s – came a couple of times a month to play hymns for a congregation of 15 on an organ that was in serious need of attention. He was always humble: wincing at any mistake his arthritic fingers made and apologising to James afterwards for the errors. But he was the best organist the parish had had in its history and an assiduous attender at any concert in the local area.

My chief purpose is to pay tribute to Jim. Hundreds of people benefited from his warmth, his abundant knowledge, his gifts as a teacher, his inspired belief in the power of good music and his great good humour. Thank you, Jim.



*Former Directors of Music, Ralph Allwood and Jim Peschek
at the OU Musicians' Drinks event in London, 2016*
