



Think Local, Go Global

Chipping Campden Music Festival celebrates twenty-fifth anniversary with a magnificent fortnight of concerts (10 – 22 May 2027)

Compelling programme includes performances by Sir András Schiff, Steven Osborne, Steven Isserlis, Julian Bliss, Mary Bevan, Nicky Spence, Ex Cathedra, BBC Singers and Leonkoro String Quartet

Festival to stage three silver jubilee concerts by the Chipping Campden Festival Academy Orchestra, including Beethoven's 'Emperor' Concerto with Steven Osborne, Saint-Saëns' two cello concertos with Steven Isserlis, and Brahms' Violin Concerto with Aleksey Semenenko

'After a long lifetime as a performer, having the chance to be part of the audience and to hear concerts of outstanding quality in such a setting is the purest joy,' Bernard Haitink

Extraordinary things occur each spring in a small market town in the Cotswolds. The Chipping Campden Music Festival, set to mark its twenty-fifth anniversary from 10 to 22 May 2027, has grown to become one of Britain's leading annual celebrations of the best in classical music, a magnet for world-class artists and cherished training ground for the next generation of professional performers. Its silver jubilee programme underlines the point with recitals by, among others, Sir András Schiff, Steven Osborne, Julian Bliss, Stephen Waarts and Festival President Steven Isserlis, Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610* given by Ex Cathedra, an enticing bill of contemplative contemporary choral works from the BBC Singers, and performances by the Leonkoro String Quartet and Leeds International Piano Competition prize winner Junyan Chen.

Festival-goers are invited to *A Most Marvellous Party* on Sunday 16 May, when Mary Bevan, Nicky Spence and Joseph Middleton perform a suitably festive programme that unites Noël Coward numbers with songs by Britten, Gershwin, Liza Lehmann, Poulenc, Quilter and Rorem. Other highlights include three concerts presented by the Chipping Campden Festival Academy Orchestra, given in company with soloists Steven Osborne, Steven Isserlis and Aleksey Semenenko, and four dates in the Festival's uplifting Young Artist Lunchtime Series.

What began in 2002 with a conversation between Chipping Campden wine merchant Charlie Bennett, the Festival's founder, and a group of like-minded friends, flourished with help from prominent musicians and others living in the area, including Julian Lloyd Webber, Tasmin Little, Alan Rusbridger (a keen amateur pianist and editor of the *Guardian* from 1995 to 2015), and Thomas Hull (the festival's conductor, then director of Ingpen & Williams, now a director at Maestro Arts). The breadth of programming expanded following the timely appointment of Paul Lewis as the Festival's President in 2005, just as his international career was booming. Bennett served as the Festival's Artistic Director until 2024, when he handed the reins to Hull and Jessica May, who has been closely involved with the Festival since its early days and who assumed the role of Festival Director in the same year.

A glance at past Festival programmes reveals a unifying emphasis on quality. "Although we will celebrate our twenty-fifth anniversary with a few more international artists than usual, we've not tried to reinvent the wheel," says Thomas Hull. "Charlie's original vision for the Festival remains unchanged. The Charlie Bennett effect is clear: 'Build a festival with the best people and the best music, and audiences will come.' Next year's programme reflects what has been achieved since 2002. The fact that I'm now Artistic Director is just part of that journey. It's not that we've suddenly arrived; the Festival has punched above its weight for a long time. Now it's time to tell that story to as many people as possible."

Artists and audiences owe a debt to the medieval masons who built St James' Church, home to Chipping Campden Festival concerts. The late Alfred Brendel considered its acoustics to be among the finest he had experienced in his sixty-year career, favouring equally orchestral concerts and solo and chamber music recitals. Around two thirds of audience members come from the town and surrounding villages, adding to the sense of pride in place that has sustained the Festival's development. "It has been led from the beginning by the principle of finding the very best that we could afford," says Jessica May. "We've pushed the boat out slightly to include a few more big names in our anniversary year. By chance our silver anniversary coincides with the announcement of our new Festival President, Steven Isserlis, who is not only a great favourite of the Campden audience but also a wonderful global ambassador for the Festival. But for our audiences, it's very much about business as usual. They have come to expect the best. The music is and always has been paramount."

The Chipping Campden Music Festival has cultivated the ideal blend of international performers and young musicians. Its annual fortnight leaves a long tail in the form of the Festival's education outreach work, now embedded in the town's schools, and in the enduring impact of the Chipping Campden Festival Academy Orchestra's side-by-side mentoring programme. Jessica May stresses the value of communicating with the local audience in building the Festival's year-round support base. "As Festival Director, my mind is always on finding the next generation of audiences, which is why building a festival that's affordable and which constantly surprises, impresses and hopefully moves people is critical. I speak to people throughout the year," she notes, "It's so important to get to know why people come to our concerts and what they think of them afterwards. That's why I like being involved in running the box office. It's important to ensure that we're not just a website, not just a faceless ticket booth, but real people who answer phones, act and listen. The support from the Campden audiences, built up over the past 25 years, merits first-class customer service. We have a very loyal local base of people who love the Festival, love what it brings to the town and what it stands for. They offer their help, they offer their homes, they offer their small change, they offer larger donations, they buy six out of every ten tickets sold. We couldn't do it without them."

Determined fundraising efforts enabled the Festival to pay every artist affected when its 2020 edition was cancelled during the first Covid-19 lockdown. They have also supported a dozen youth orchestra projects in the Chipping Campden area since 2015 and a Young Concerto Soloists series featuring advanced students from local schools. Funding for Campden Young Musicians, secured in 2024, feeds a long-term schools outreach programme devised and overseen by Jessica May, complete with children's concerts, side-by-side orchestral mentoring schemes, and the provision of free weekly instrumental lessons. The Festival runs brass and string 'schools', supplying instruments and tuition to pupils in an area of the UK where school music provision has fallen away. A woodwind school will be launched in 2027, to support primary school-aged clarinetists. A thousand children have participated in the Festival's education schemes since 2024, with over 100 now learning instruments each week.

The jewel in the Festival's education crown, the Chipping Campden Festival Academy Orchestra, has been polished since its creation in 2008 by Charlie Bennett and its conductor

Thomas Hull. The initiative places around twenty-five professional players side-by-side with outstanding young music students, the latter chosen through annual auditions, the former for their expertise as mentors and enablers. Unlike other orchestral mentoring programmes, students are placed on every desk of the orchestra. "The reason it works is that it's not conducted by some famous name," says Thomas Hull. "If it was, it would always be about them. But it's always all about the orchestra. The players shine because of it. They are looked after by the community, which has helped make the orchestra so cohesive. Our alumni love their time with us because they stay in beautiful houses, make friends for life and have a wonderful experience making music at a very high level."

<https://www.campdenmayfestivals.co.uk/music/events>

The information in this press release was correct at the time of sending. Please check the organisations' websites and social media for the latest updates.

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