

My Alternative Biography: Hattie Butterworth, Cello

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“24 year old cellist Hattie Butterworth is a Countess of Munster Trust award holder and recent graduate of the Royal College of Music, where she studied as a foundation scholar with professors Raphael Wallfisch and Melissa Phelps.”

Hattie’s time at RCM was both creative and exciting, but she suffered from OCD and anxiety for most of her time studying. Although receiving a scholarship, she always felt it wasn't deserved, having been rejected from the Royal Academy of Music and the National Youth Orchestra the year before. She struggled through the relationship with her first teacher and suffered hugely with performance anxiety. Her final recital was deferred due to a period of severe mental illness during the first lockdown and, although she played better than she ever thought possible in the circumstances, she still felt as if she had failed due to receiving a ii.I instead of the first class she had hoped for.

“Hattie has given solo recitals at the London Charterhouse, Lichfield Festival, The Town Church in St Peter Port, Guernsey, St Brides, St Olaves Hart St, St Peter’s Church Canterbury and Manchester Cathedral. She has also performed in masterclasses with eminent professors, such as Torleif Thedeen, Johannes Goritzki, Hannah Roberts and Guy Johnston.”

Hattie enjoys performing solo to audiences, but many performances listed were given in times of mental distress, as well as performing purely to be able to add it to a biography and feel worthy as a musician. She broke free from much self doubt in her final year of RCM and enjoyed giving duo recitals with less judgment and a knowledge of her gift of giving to an audience. Hattie still deals with performance anxiety and can feel completely dissociated in some performances. She can really hate performing, dreading it and begging for it to end ASAP when her anxiety is bad.

“Hattie has performed as a concerto soloist with orchestras, most recently performing Bloch’s ‘From Jewish Life’ with the Hereford Youth Orchestra and the Rococo Variations with the Bridgnorth Sinfonia.”

Performing with the Hereford Youth Orchestra and Bridgnorth Sinfonia happened at a time where Hattie was dealing with OCD intrusive paranoia thoughts about her friends and family. She was struggling to eat, which subsequently led to using food control as a means of coping. She had to call her sister mid-panic attack before the Hereford concert and can’t actually remember much of the Rococo Variations, although remembers making a promise never to put so much pressure on herself again.

“She has also sat as principal cello in the Royal College of Music Philharmonic Orchestra, Chipping Campden Academy Orchestra and toured Russia and the UK with the Britten Shostakovich Festival Orchestra in 2019.”

Hattie absolutely loved her time in RCM orchestras, in both sickness and health, although wishes she was able to communicate her illness on some occasions, instead of damaging her mental health by pushing through. During the BSFO tour she was dealing with disordered eating and exercise. She was still also dealing with intrusive thoughts, though felt proud that she was able to travel and function again as a musician.

“Hattie is the cellist in the award-winning Odora Piano Trio. The trio were semi-finalists in the 2020 St Martin’s Chamber Competition at St Martin in-the-Fields and have achieved numerable successes in national competitions...”

Hattie loves being part of a piano trio, although has been through times recently where it has been difficult to maintain performing with them, due to living at home for financial and mental health reasons. She has felt she has let her friends down, also because she is now working a 9-5 to gain writing experience and afford living in London. This leaves very little time to rehearse and practice, though feels like an important sacrifice at the moment. She still loves uncovering new music and loves how much of an opportunity her job at Schott gives her to explore future trio repertoire.

“Hattie is committed to raising awareness for the prevalence of mental health issues among musicians. She is establishing herself as a writer and journalist, recently contributing to publications such as Classical Music Magazine, The Meridian and Larsen Strings blog. Hattie also hosts a podcast, Things Musicians Don’t Talk About, [...] Hattie is training for her Level 2 in Counselling Skills and hopes to combine being a classical cellist with work in the mental health and journalism sectors.”

Although writing and advocacy is one of the most fulfilling parts to Hattie’s life, she feels far from established and can even feel jealous of others writing more eloquently, speaking out more frequently or with better ideas. She feels ashamed of feeling this way and wishes she could just stay on her own path to advocacy without comparison and ego getting in the way. Hattie trained for her Level 2 in counselling skills because she became fascinated in how counsellors practice. She was missing her previous counsellor and thought the course would give her a connection to someone she had developed an unhealthy attachment to.