

and Sarah Williamson

her partner, Alexander, a barrister. For relaxation, Williamson makes coil pots. "I was given my own kiln for a birthday present last year," she says. Pottery is a hobby that she finds relaxing. She also loves cooking.

When not doing concerts, Williamson practises around six hours each day. "Today, I wouldn't have time - but I'll probably have two-and-a-half hours of rehearsal, and an hour of playing. I have the new Joseph Phibbs Concerto that the Orchestra of the Swan have commissioned, to première at the Cadogan Hall on the 28th October. I'm trying to do a lot of work on that. And I'm doing a recording for the SOMM record label, in mid-October, also with the Orchestra of the Swan."

Is the six hours structured? "I do what needs doing," she says. "I have a collection of German studies, with good exercises. I play through that every day. I could do more than six hours if I wanted to, but it would annoy the neighbours!" She laughs. "I just like doing it. I don't do it because I want to beat myself up. I love playing. If I've got time to do that much, it's nice, though probably not necessary. To do too much is bad. I don't think I'd practise as much if I didn't have the concerts. We're all different."

Williamson still takes the occasional consultation lesson. "I went over to Paris in July. I had a Wigmore Hall evening recital with Philip Moore, the pianist whom I've played with for many years now. He is truly outstanding. I thought: 'I've got to go and play to one of my old teachers at the conservatoire'. I turned up, and played to Olivier Derbesse. It's always good to play for someone, no matter how old you are, because you need the opinions of others. You can't just sit back, thinking, 'Oh, I'm great'. I'm neurotic about my sound. It's good to be like that though, except that it can stop you enjoying it."

"I don't worry about all of the other clarinetists who are out there. I just wish them well. It's a good thing that there are so many clarinetists, that everyone's unique, that they have their own style and their own character to their playing. How dull and boring it would be if there was only one clarinetist in the world. Often I try to take things from other people's playing, as well. I find it good to go and listen to other people. Whether it be violin playing or double bass playing, you can always take something from other players. I find that quite valuable."

"Composition? I wrote a piece which I called *Obsessive Proximity*, which was performed at the Academy. I'd scored it for string orchestra, two electric violins, two electric guitars, and two kit percussionists. A complete failure, it was so loud, and didn't work. Composition isn't for me; I'll stick to playing other people's music."

"I don't think there are enough clarinet works by contemporary British composers."

That's something I'm keen to change. I played a piece by Joseph Phibbs at the Wigmore Hall, two years ago, called *Arc de Soleil*, for clarinet and piano, which I commissioned. I'd heard his piece *Illumina* played in the last night of the Proms. I thought: 'Wow. This is a fantastic composer.' So I decided to meet him. I said: 'Will you write me a piece? I'll give you any amount of money, just write me a piece.' He said: 'Yes, alright'.

"That was the beginning of our collaboration. I then managed to persuade the conductor David Curtis, of the Orchestra of the Swan, to commission a new clarinet concerto from Phibbs. It's not so technically demanding, but in a way that's such a good thing. Everyone will be able to play it. To write hard pieces that nobody bar two people in the whole world can play is silly. You need something that's playable, and also that's not too hard on the ear. I hope it's a success." ■

