

# Double Acts

Inside views on relationships in the string world

Violinist Benjamin Nabarro and cellist Gemma Rosefield explain how supporting each other is a vital part of their relationship

## BENJAMIN NABARRO

WE HAVE A SIMILAR APPROACH to how we think about music and for coping with day-to-day things. When you're in a relationship with someone you perform with, you often have stressful moments at the same time. Somehow we manage to support each other through them. Sometimes it's obvious when one of us needs a little extra support and encouragement, sometimes not. That's the tricky bit. But I think we do quite well.

WE MET BY CHANCE AT THE WYE VALLEY CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL, where we played in a quartet together (although we already knew of each other through friends). We enjoyed working together, but didn't meet up again for a while. Then Gemma joined my chamber group, Ensemble 360. Out of that group we formed the Leonore Piano Trio, and we give duo recitals together – our relationship just happened during all of that. I think it could be difficult if you're already in a relationship and you tried to play together – it could feel contrived – but for us it's all evolved naturally.

GEMMA HAD AN ACCIDENT 18 MONTHS AGO. We were travelling to a concert and were diverted, due to roadworks, over a very steep and ice-covered hill. Our car got stuck on the ice, and started to slide down the hill towards a huge drop. We had to get out very quickly and Gemma fell and banged her head. She had some nerve damage that meant she couldn't play for nine months. It was quite an ordeal – not knowing how long it would be before she could play again. In August 2012 she was back performing with the trio. I had thought that it might feel weird, but it was exactly how it had been before. Gemma was amazing. She took it in her stride. I found it inspiring that even though she had moments when she couldn't imagine playing again, she just picked up the cello and tried it out, and it gave her the confidence to get back into it.

WE DO A LOT OF CAR JOURNEYS from London because of Ensemble 360's residency in Sheffield. It's enforced time together and we do a lot of talking. It can be a great time to have a long, slow, ongoing conversation in a way that we wouldn't have the time for otherwise. Working so intimately with your partner isn't for everybody, but for me, I wouldn't want it any other way. Music has always been the thing that excites me more than anything else. And I can't imagine not sharing that with Gemma.



## GEMMA ROSEFIELD

I DIDN'T PLAY FOR NINE OR TEN MONTHS after my accident. Ben was amazing during that time and kept me positive. I began to lose my confidence, but with Ben's encouragement, I decided to go for it. Ben said, 'We'll see what happens. What will be will be.' And that turns out to have been the best thing for me.

WE BOTH LOVE COOKING. I find it relaxing to bake after a concert, and often we'll take the cakes to rehearsals – our friends get disappointed now if I turn up empty-handed. We do such a lot of travelling that it feels nice to get back to your own kitchen and cook the food you like to eat. Ben's calm in the kitchen, whereas I'm not. If someone asked me to cook them a meal, I'd get stressed about it, but Ben stays very collected. He gets me on chopping duties – he's a great cook and I've definitely gained in confidence in the kitchen. He's taught me a lot.

DURING A TOUR OF NEW ZEALAND with our piano trio, we arrived at the last minute at a venue to discover that the piano was more than a semitone flat. It was immediately obvious that we couldn't do a trio concert. Our pianist, Tim Horton, quickly practised a Beethoven piano sonata and Ben and I went to print off the music for Halvorsen's Passacaglia, arranged for

violin and cello, and the Ravel Sonata. Luckily we had both played the pieces before, or else we might have panicked.

WE'VE JUST SPENT THREE DAYS RECORDING PIANO TRIOS. It was an intense period in a remote place with no mobile phone reception. I'd never thought it would be possible to be in a relationship with someone I perform with. We sometimes argue about who's going to do the driving, but otherwise we give each other the space we need, so our relationship works.

WE WORK WITH EACH OTHER SO MUCH that any time off we have together is really precious – to relax together when we've just shared something intense in our professional lives is an incredible feeling. I'm still surprised by it. People might wonder if we get sick of each other, but we do our own solo things and it's very special to be with someone who knows exactly what you're going through. ■

INTERVIEWS BY CATHERINE NELSON