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Join an orchestra for the evening

By Tara Kelly

Simon Hewitt Jones, the conductor, flicks back his floppy hair as he glances over the score of Corelli's Christmas Concerto, the music for the evening. "How confident are you feeling tonight?" he asks us as the first and second violins negotiate seating arrangements.



Almost a decade has elapsed since I played in an orchestra but London's chamber music soir e, Music and the City (MATC), proves the perfect occasion to brush up on my ensemble playing. Beforehand, over canap es and wine at MATC's venue, the sophisticated 1901 Arts Club, I confess to founder Clare Barrins that I have only tackled half the piece in advance. She reassures me that most of my fellow amateur musicians will be sight reading too.

Creaking silver stands unravel, bows are tightened and the room fills with a crescendo of scales and arpeggios. I place my second violin part on the stand and my bow sinks into my A string. I discover I am remarkably in tune. The conductor grabs the attention of the ensemble and the rehearsal begins, leading us into the first part of the concerto in B flat major. He reminds us *vivace* means liveliness and uses adventurous analogies to illustrate how Corelli intended the music to be delivered. A few of the professionals who are present join the ensemble and together we embark on "Pastorelle", the final passage.

After an hour's practice, we are ready for our performance. A group of 15 or so guests huddles into the room. Simon is as impressed as we are at the enthusiastic applause. More red wine is consumed while we form quartets to play chamber music. I find myself nodding when one of my fellow musicians asks if I will return for the next soir e in January.

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The details

Music and the City meets monthly. Amateur musicians, £25 (\$37)/guests £10;
www.musicandthecity.org

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