

The Amazing Watkins Family



Read the newspaper article about a musical family. Then read the questions and choose A, B, C or D.

The sons are composers and prize-winning musicians, while Dad makes the instruments. Matthew Rye reports.

Whole families of musicians are not exactly rare. However, it is unusual to come across one that includes not only writers and performers of music, but also an instrument maker.

When South Wales schoolteachers John and Hetty Watkins needed to get their ten-year-old son, Paul, a cello to suit his blossoming talents, they balked at the costs involved. "We had a look at various dealers and it was obvious it was going to be very expensive," John says. "So I wondered if I could actually make one. I discovered that the *Welsh School of Instrument Making* was not far from where I lived, and I went along for evening classes once a week for about three years."

"After probably three or four goes with violins and violas, he had a crack at his first cello," Paul, now 28, adds, "It turned out really well. He made me another one a bit later, when he'd got the hang of it. And that's the one I used right up until a few months ago." John has since retired as a teacher to work as a full-time craftsman, and makes up to a dozen violins a year - selling one to the esteemed American player Jaime Laredo was "the icing on the cake."

Both Paul and his younger brother, Huw, were encouraged to play music from an early age. The piano came first: "As soon as I was big enough to climb up and bang the keys, that's what I did," Paul remembers. But it wasn't long before the cello beckoned. "My folks were really quite keen for me to take up the violin, because Dad, who played the viola, used to play chamber music with his mates and they needed another violin to make up a string trio. I learned it for about six weeks but I didn't take to it. But I really took to the character who played the cello in Dad's group. I thought he was very cool guy when I was six or seven. So he said he'd give me some lessons, and that really started it all off. Later, they suggested that my brother play the violin too, but would have none of it.

"My parents were both supportive and relaxed," Huw says. "I don't think I would have responded very well to being pushed. And, rather than feeling threatened by Paul's success, I found that I had something to aspire to." Now 22, he is beginning to make his own mark as a pianist and composer.

Meanwhile, John Watkins' cello has done his elder son proud. With it, Paul won the string final of the *BBC Young Musician of the Year* competition. Then, at the remarkably youthful age of 20, he was appointed principal cellist of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, a position he held, still playing his father's instrument, until last year. Now, however, he has acquired a Francesco Rugeri cello, on loan from the Royal Academy of Music. "Dad's not said anything about me moving on, though recently he had the chance to run a bow across the strings of each in turn and had to admit that my new one is quite nice! I think the only thing Dad's doesn't have - and may acquire after about 50-100 years - is the power to project right to the back of large concert halls. It will get richer with age, like my Rugeri, which is already 304 years old."

Soon he will be seen on television playing the Rugeri as the soloist in Elgar's Cello Concerto, which forms the heart of the second program in the new series, *Masterworks*. "The well-known performance history doesn't affect the way I play the work," he says. "I'm always going to do it my way." But Paul won't be able to watch himself on television - the same night he is playing at the Cheltenham Festival. Nor will Huw, whose String Quartet is receiving its London premiere at the Wigmore Hall the same evening. John and Hetty will have to be diplomatic - and energetic - if they are to keep track of all their sons' musical activities over the coming weeks.

1 Why did John Watkins decided to make a cello?

- A He wanted to encourage his son Paul to take up the instrument.
- B He was keen to do a course at the nearby school.
- C He felt the dealers were giving him false information
- D He wanted to avoid having to pay for one.

2 What is meant by "crack" in line 17?

- A attempt
- B plan
- C shock
- D period

3 What do we learn in the third paragraph about the instruments John has made?

- A He considers the one used by Jaime Laredo to be the best.
- B He is particularly pleased about what happened to one of them.
- C His violins have turned out to be better than his cellos.
- D It took him longer to learn how to make cellos than violins.

4 Paul first became interested in playing the cello because

- A he admired someone his father played music with
- B he wanted to play in his father's group.
- C he was not very good at playing the piano.
- D he did not want to do what his parents wanted.

5 What do we learn about Huw's musical development?

- A His parents' attitude has played little part in it.
- B It was slow because he lacked determination.
- C His brother's achievements gave him an aim.
- D He wanted it to be different from his brother's.

6 What does Paul say about the Rugeri cello?

- A His father's reaction to it worried him.
- B The cello his father made may become as good as it.
- C It has qualities that he had not expected.
- D He was not keen to tell his father that he was using it.

7 What does Paul say about the performance of Elgar's Cello Concerto?

- A It is less traditional than other performances he has given.
- B Some viewers are likely to have a low opinion of it.
- C He considers it to be one of his best performances.
- D It is typical of his approach to everything he plays.

8 What will require some effort from John and Hetty Watkins?

- A preventing their sons from taking on too much work.
- B being aware of everything their sons are involved in.
- C reminding their sons what they have arranged to do.
- D advising their sons on what they should do next.

