theweekend

SCHOOL RUNS AND SONATAS

By day she's a busy mum, by night a classical musician

By CAROLINE DUTTON

RACHAEL Clegg has just got home from the school run when I call for our interview.

Her youngest son, still barely more than a toddler, is sitting in the other room watching his favourite cartoons.

It sounds like your average domestic set-up. But Rachael, 41, who was born in Colne and brought up in Fence, isn't your average working mum.

For she has to juggle looking after her two sons, aged eight and five, with playing principal oboe for Manchester Camerata.

"The main challenge is organisation," said Rachael, who now lives in Manchester with her boys and husband, who plays principal double bass for the Hallé Orchestra.

"Because I don't have a nine-to-five job I have to be ultra-organised in dropping-off and picking up the boys from school. Some weeks are busier than others — for instance, this week I'm rehearsing in the afternoons and playing concerts in the evening for three nights so I won't see my boys apart from for an hour in the morning. But they've grown up with it so they're used to it. For them it's normal.

"Occasionally they say: 'Mummy, are we not going to see you again tonight?' and I feel awful. But I've never ever thought of stopping because I think it's important that I do this."

Rachael has been playing oboe since she was 10 years old and has been with the Manchester Camerata for a decade.

"I have a prestigious position in

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Classics are for everyone

» FROM PAGE 17

a fantastic chamber orchestra and I feel really lucky, not just because the standard is so amazingly high, but because it's an incredibly friendly orchestra to be in," she said.

"Camerata actually means a group of friends and it really feels like that because there's only 25 of us, so you do know every single person. A lot of them are my closest friends."

Playing together requires team work and, above all, trust.

"We work very closely," said Rachael. "After 10 years together you get to know each other's playing and what each other's little foibles are. You know how to read each other, and you know how people react to things. Because I sit in the middle I tend to do quite a lot of leading. I make decisions on where we're going to place a chord or how we're going to do things and that's not done by speaking, but by gesture and by telepathy really! It's good fun — sometimes it works brilliantly and sometimes it goes a bit awry. After a concert I always come away feeling electric, though. I can't believe how lucky I am to be getting paid to do something I love doing. I wake up in the morning with a smile on my face, so I consider myself really blessed."

Rachael, a former Walton High School pupil, is passionate about bringing classical music to a younger audience.

> If children work hard they can succeed
>
> RACHAEL CLEGG

And her role as Colne's Musician In Residence means she often gets to play in East Lancashire schools.

"The problem is that music is not as important as it used to be in our schools," said Rachael.

"GCSE music is all about composing a pop song nowadays. I'm a musician so I'm probably biased, but this morning I was playing a CD to my children in the car and it just so happened to be a classical CD and they loved it. The point is that if kids did come to our concerts and you backed it up with interesting facts they'd be gripped. It doesn't have to be popular music to fire their imagination."

As Musician In Residence, Rachael gives talks and recitals at local venues.

"I do a lot of teaching and participation, going into schools to talk about music and hopefully fostering a new generation of concert-goers," she said.

"I've done recitals in Towneley Hall, at Pendle Heritage Centre and in my old high school. I play and talk to the children about my job. I tell them that if they find something they're good at and work really hard they can do well. It's so easy to give up when something is hard. I always felt when I was younger that it was an impossible dream and that everyone was better than me. Nobody really told me that it was possible so I was disheartened for a number of years, but I stuck at it. I think it's important to tell children that if they work hard they can succeed. I wasn't very academic at school. If I can do it, anybody can."

Rachael's highlight of the job is definitely performing.

"We played at the Proms this year and that was amazing — it's the biggest venue you can imagine and it's one of the best dates to do," she said.

"But we get to do lots of other gigs too. I've just been offered to do a date with comedian Bill Bailey, so that will be great as he's hilarious. Then we're doing the light opera tour with Lesley Garrett, so it's really very varied. We don't normally know what we're doing until the day. We arrive, sight read the music and play it later that day.

"This week I was on Woman's Hour talking to Jenni Murray about a project I've taken part in to get teenage mums to sing to their children, as it's a dying art. I listen to the show every day so I was a bit like: 'Jenni Murray has just said my name!'"

The Manchester Camerata is Europe's only orchestra which has links with a conservatoire. In this case, the Royal Northern College of Music, where Rachael herself learned her craft 20 years ago.

"We have rehearsal space and offices at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and so we have very close links to the conservatoire," said Rachael.

"We invite students to come and play with the orchestra and we do educational projects with them. It sounds a bit corny but it feels like giving something back."

Rachael's sons both show aptitude for music, but she admitted she would think twice before encouraging them to enter the profession.

"Things are very different now than they were 20 years ago," she said.

"Times are tough because of the recession and music is definitely suffering. People just aren't coming out because it's considered a luxury, so our audience numbers are dropping. It's not just us — all orchestras are feeling it. We're in a precarious position all of the time in the arts because of funding so we're always desperate to raise awareness so more people come to our concerts."

So Rachael's final message to all those people who have ever wondered what a classical concert is like is to try it out.

"Our orchestra is something special," she said.

"Usually when people come they go: 'Wow, I didn't know it was going to be that good — why haven't we been before?'

"A classical concert is varied entertainment. It's not just people sitting there in penguin suits. There's lots of interaction, the conductor talks to the audience and the soloists are of the highest international standards."

HIGH NOTE: Rachael Clegg visits schools to play, and talk about, music

● See Rachael play with Manchester Camerata at Colne Muni on Thursday, November 19. Call box office on 01282 66123.

5 other things to do this week

KARAOKE

WHAT: Karaoke

WHERE: Woodlands, Preston new Road, Blackburn

WHEN: Tomorrow at 8pm

FARMERS' MARKET

WHAT: Farmers' Market

WHERE: Hoghton Tower

WHEN: Tomorrow 10am

AMNESTY PARTY

WHAT: Protect The Human Party (Amnesty International)

WHERE: 41 King Street, Blackburn

WHEN: Today at 6pm

GARDENING

WHAT: Afternoon Tea and Gardeners Question Time

WHERE: Holy Souls Church Hall, Brownhill Road, Blackburn

WHEN: Today 2pm

JUMBLE SALE

WHAT: Jumble Sale

WHERE: Croston Pre-School, Chorley

WHEN: Today 10am

Holding an event? Let us know

lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/whatson

Paul's a worthy successor to Lowry

AN artist described as a 'modern day Lowry' will bring his new collection to Lancashire as part of a new nationwide tour entitled 'Love is Life'.

Paul Horton will be making a special appearance in the gallery from 12noon to 3pm tomorrow to launch the exhibition.

The artist, who draws on the unique style made famous by LS Lowry, grew up in the grey industrial landscape of Birmingham in the '60s and '70s but instead of turning his back on his sometimes dreary city surroundings, Horton transformed the working man and terraced back streets of his home town into highly collectable art — with his original paintings fetching anything up to £15,000.

The 'Love is Life' collection will bring his work within the reach of all collectors, at a time when the credit crunch is biting hard.

Horton's nine strong limited edition pieces of artwork start from just £199 and the collection includes a limited edition sculpture, 'Beside The Sea'.

● 'Love is Life' by Paul Horton can be seen at The Original Art Shop, Fishergate Walk, The Mall, Preston from tomorrow. The gallery is open Monday to Saturday 9am-5.30pm, Sunday 11am-4pm. For more information telephone the gallery on 01772 257770 or visit www.originalartshop.co.uk

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