



## The kora comes to Bristol

THE CITY of Bristol is one of the smallest of all our counties and is entirely urban. This makes it very different from large rural counties and garden parties are not so easy to organise! Bristol has its own special solution, a June summer concert. Previous concerts have been held in Bristol Cathedral but I decided to use St George's Bristol, a concert hall described as having one of the finest acoustics in Europe.

A joyful event was vital and I also wanted to reflect the diversity of our wonderful city. The centrepiece was commissioned by me and my husband; a concerto for kora (a 22-stringed West African harp) and orchestra. Jointly composed by William Goodchild, conductor of the Bristol Symphony Orchestra and Mamadou Cissokho, a seventh generation Senegalese master kora player from Bristol, it received an extended standing ovation from the rapturous audience. The finale was the energetic Serenade in D by Dame Ethel Smyth, a rarely heard but prolific British composer from the turn of the nineteenth century, highly thought of by Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Sir Thomas Beecham. She was also a prominent campaigner for women's rights.

Having lived in Bristol for 40 years I thought I knew it well but my privileged access as High Sheriff has given me a new



**Above:** Soloist Mamadou Cissokho receives applause from conductor William Goodchild and the Bristol Symphony Orchestra at the end of the High Sheriff's concert in June

understanding of my home city. There have been many high-profile events: the 500-year-old tradition of Rush Sunday at St Mary Redcliffe; the declaration of our second elected city mayor; and several royal visits. During a visit by HRH The Prince of Wales to the Prince's Trust, it was very inspiring to meet Major Tim Peake, our intrepid British astronaut. Smaller events have been particularly inspiring. So much is done by community groups and charities and it is hard to pick out notable examples but opening our local May Fair, opening two primary schools and hosting a lunch for local Home-Start charity volunteers were especially memorable.

More unusually I collaborated with Edward Bayntun-Coward, High Sheriff of Somerset, in the topping-out ceremony of the incredible new St Monica Trust retirement community in the refurbished chocolate factory in Keynsham near Bristol. The trust was started by the famous Bristol Wills family and now has five retirement communities in both Bristol and Somerset. Court dress and site safety clothing made an interesting sartorial combination!

Of course, links with the police and judiciary have been very important and I have had close relationships with the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable. A visit to a Bristol initiative, the Lighthouse Project supporting victims and witnesses, was something I knew little about and found tremendously inspiring.

Finally, it has been a real education and pleasure to meet and host some of our visiting High Court Judges. I have learnt so much about the legal system and have seen it in action for myself. We have entertained judges at home with dinners prepared by Stephen Markwick, a celebrated recently retired Bristol chef.

I have always thought my home city was a special place but the role of High Sheriff has made me appreciate even more what it has to offer.

◆ Helen Wilde

*High Sheriff of Bristol 2016-17*



**Above:** Helen Wilde opened the Redland May Fair with Bristol's famous Ambling Band