

# CULTURE

It's difficult to know where to start when writing about Christopher Ball. He seems to have packed a great deal into a life that started back in 1936 yet is still as busy as it ever was.

We talk in his Marylebone flat, and upon arrival I instantly discover why the 74-year-old musician is more sprightly than many people half his age. It's the stairs. They seem to go on forever and have me wishing for crampons and ropes by the time we reach the top. Having eventually recovered from the ascent, and

reclining in a comfortable chair in the room where Christopher used to teach, I ask if he came from a musical family.

"My parents loved classical music," he says. "My father trained as a piano tuner and my mother was a gifted pianist, though she wasn't a professional. I suppose I had the usual other interests but music became an obsession from about the age of 11. I used to go to symphony concerts at Leeds Town Hall every weekend."

The instrument that would turn this passion into a career was the

clarinet. It was while listening to a book serialisation for children on The Light Programme, that its sound captivated him. The series first instalment had begun with a long, lone tune. "I thought it was absolutely beautiful," Christopher recalls. "I had to find out what that sound was, and once I knew it was a clarinet, I gave my parents no peace."

Pester power paid off, and having got his first clarinet he showed a real aptitude for the instrument. Within two years he was auditioning for The



## BATON CHARGE