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Remembering Lenny

Maya Koch and Matthew Trusler's son was two hours old when he died of a rare kidney disorder. Here, they tell how they keep his memory alive through music

ALISON ROBERTS



HOW does one possibly come to terms with the death of a newborn baby? For Matthew Trusler and Maya Koch, two professional violinists from north London, the answer to this unimaginably awful question lies in reclaiming their son's memory from the pain and grief it might otherwise forever evoke. And it lies, too, in music.

This week, a special concert at Kings Place, featuring children's poetry by Spike Milligan, Roald Dahl and A A Milne and narrated by Geraldine James, with music chosen by Maya, will raise money for the Lenny Trusler Children's Foundation, a charity established a month after Lenny's death. "We felt immediately — on the day he died — that we needed to do something positive for him," says Matthew. "It wouldn't have been fair on him to remember him only with sadness."

Lenny, who suffered from a rare condition called Potter's syndrome, lived for just two hours at the Whittington Hospital in Archway. Both Trusler and Koch are internationally sought-after musicians — Matthew, 32, has played with many of the world's best orchestras — and in the hours after Lenny's death, they began to plan a means to revive his name. "It was only us who got to meet him," says 30-year-old Maya. "But I want the world to know what he meant to us."

She was 35 weeks pregnant when a routine visit to the GP raised suspicions that all might not be well. "It had been a really straightforward pregnancy but the doctor thought my bump was a little on the small side. She ordered a growth scan just to be safe." It was Easter 2007, and Matthew was staying in a lavish five-star hotel in Kuala Lumpur, on tour with the Malaysian Philharmonic.

"That scan was probably the worst moment of my life," continues Maya. "I was on my own and I could barely understand what the doctor was saying, it seemed so shocking. I just wanted to go away and hide."

Potter's syndrome, also known as bilateral renal agenesis, means the kidneys fail to develop in the first few weeks of foetal growth, resulting in a shortage of amniotic fluid and the underdevelopment of the lungs. It is



New love: Matthew Trusler and Maya Koch with their eight-month-old daughter Lily, born just a year after her brother Lenny, who died at birth

Rebecca Reid

'He looked perfect, a completely normal baby. I gazed at him and thought, maybe they got it wrong'

always fatal, and many babies are stillborn.

The condition affects no more than one in 10,000 babies born in the UK and is normally picked up at the 20-week scan. The Truslers are unsure why Lenny's condition was not detected until 35 weeks; but they too were offered a termination, despite the lateness of the pregnancy. "That seemed like just about

the worst idea ever," says Matthew. "We knew that the prognosis was terrible, but we didn't want that."

Immediately after the scan, Maya phoned Matthew in Malaysia. Both recall the events of those few weeks with understandable anguish. "It was surreal," says Matthew wearily. "The day before, everything was great. I was about to have a baby, I was staying in this fantastic place, my career was going well. By the time I left that hotel, it was a hellhole. I'll never forget the music in the elevators. I'll always associate it with that horrendous news."

At home in Crouch End, Maya was replaying all the music she had played to Lenny in the womb. "He heard so much music while I was pregnant — but there was a lot more I wanted him to hear."

In the end Lenny was born naturally

and alive. "The doctors whisked him away checked him out and then gave him back to us so that we could spend as much time with him as possible. He looked perfect, a completely normal baby," says Maya. "I remember gazing at him and thinking, maybe they got it all wrong. He's going to be fine ..."

"It was a very calm and peaceful thing for Lenny," adds Matthew. "When he ran out of oxygen after about two hours, he just dropped off."

"I'm so glad we gave him the chance to live even for that short time," continues Maya. "The love you feel when you see your own child is so extraordinary I'd never want to miss it. He was only here for a while, but he had such an impact on our lives."

Maya recalls the birdsong in the garden as she sat at home afterwards.

"The weather was so beautiful and yet there we were, sitting alone without our baby." Desperate to distract herself, she began to plan a CD of children's music and poetry. "I was in such a state, but this was something I took refuge in; it was a way of keeping myself sane."

The CD, again featuring children's poetry interspersed with music, will be released next month on Orchid Classics, a label Matthew set up three years ago.

London's classical music world is notoriously small, and within days of Lenny's death, Matthew called one of his great mentors, Elise Smith, the American wife of the former chairman of English National Opera, Martin Smith, whose own foundation donates to numerous arts and academic

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FEELGOOD FACTOR

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Jasmine Gardner tries a body wrap that promises to help you lose weight

What is it? A two-hour body wrap, using algae-soaked bandages, designed to relieve water retention and shrink your body by just enough inches to fit you back into your favourite dress, in time for the Christmas party.

Any science to it? I have always been doubtful of the science behind inch-loss wraps, but I'm assured that this really does work. The algae (apparently from the North Sea) has a high salt content causing the body to lose water through osmosis. It also stimulates your metabolism and draws out wastes and toxins from the tissue.

What's it like? Bravery is a definite requirement. Not only does my therapist measure every section of my body to the millimetre, but as I'm swaddled in the sopping bandages from the ankle up, I may as well be wading right into the North Sea — they're freezing.

Thankfully, the next stage involves being wrapped in foil and towels and I warm up quickly. Once I'm fully cocooned, a mini-facial and head massage help me to drift into a state of tranquillity as my skin is cleansed, exfoliated and soothed.

I'm usually a face-wash, water and light moisturiser sort of girl, so the glut of products being applied to my face in succession feels a little overwhelming, but it's relaxing enough to make me stop caring and I begin to drift off to sleep.

There is a small moment of horror when the bandages are removed and the icy cold returns. The hot towels I'm rubbed with do little to stop me shivering and I'm rushed into a hot shower. Once I'm clean of algae, a light oil is massaged into my skin, before I'm re-measured to assess the results.

Verdict: To my surprise, it works. I lost 13.3cm mainly from my abdomen, waist and hips and my boyfriend insists I look totally refreshed. The real shock comes when I get on the scales at home and discover I'm three pounds lighter.

Cost and contact: £80 including the mini facial at The Spa, Thistle City Bar/Club, Central Street, EC1 (0871 376 9004, www.thistle.com/hotels/barclub/leisure or call 01273 837 302 for your nearest salon).



It's a wrap: algae-soaked bandages can reduce the body's water content

THE unerring response of many men to the season for buying their womenfolk presents is to make for the scent counter of a department store and throw cash at a girl behind a pile of gift-wrapped boxes. Perfume is, in fact, the fall-back Christmas present for both sexes, except this year there's less cash to throw at it.

Don't worry: You can get lovely scent for under £35. You just have to be a bit more imaginative: buy a smaller bottle, or go for slightly less well known names — an awful lot of the price of the best-known scents goes on marketing, not content.

In a bid to seek out the best credit crunch fragrances, I made straight for the great perfume guru, Roja Dove, who has a shop of his own, the Roja Dove Haute Parfumerie, on the fifth floor of Harrods. It's one of the few places in London — another being the large second-floor perfume section of Fortnum & Mason — where buying scent is an outright pleasure.

"There is a reason why the finest perfume is expensive: jasmine from Grasse is more expensive than gold. But you can get lovely fragrances relatively inexpensively. They don't usually have the long-lasting elements of expensive scent but they could help you rediscover a new level of subtlety and finesse."

Here is a selection of (relatively) inexpensive fragrance, for women and men.



Credit crunch scent

Great perfume needn't cost a fortune. **Melanie McDonagh** picks the best for £35 or less

Altamir (Ted Lapidus)
Soft, vanilla, very balsamic, with a whisper of flowers for men. (75ml eau de toilette, £33)

4711 (Muelhens)
The classic cologne. Everyone should have a bottle. It's like water: splash it on or pour yourself a bath and throw it in. Some people might not like it because it's "old": I wouldn't be without it. (200ml, £27.50)

Eau Dynamisante (Clarins)
A body treatment that moisturises and softens the skin and has lots of natural ingredients. It's a chypre variant on a classic eau de cologne, but will linger. (200ml, £32.50)

Mini Him & Her Collections (Penhaligon's)
A set of four 5ml bottles for men and women. These are lovely scents, very easy to wear. The little coffrets are beautifully presented. They're perfect little gifts. (£25 each)

Ombre Rose (Jean-Charles Brousseau)
The company's L'Original is one of the most important scents to be launched in the past century. It's powdery, dusty, very, very feminine and womanly. Not a girl's scent. It's incredibly difficult to get a good violet scent but Brousseau's Fleurs D'Ombre Violette Menthe is delicious, while Fleurs D'Ombre



Flowery: Altamir by Ted Lapidus

Jasmine Illas is a lovely combination of sweetness and freshness. (All three: 30ml eau de toilette, £25)

Vent Vert (Balmain)
This is a very good scent, although the formula has been much tampered-with since the original made in 1947 for Pierre Balmain by Germaine Cellier. (50ml, £32)

Encre Noir and Eau de Lalique (Lalique)
Encre Noir is an interesting fougère/chypre fragrance for men. The bottle is made to look like an old inkwell. Eau de Lalique is for men and women and has a lot of structure; it's more dynamic than traditional eau de cologne and long-lasting. (Encre Noir, 50ml eau de toilette, £35; Eau de Lalique 50ml eau de toilette, £27)

Grey Fannel (Geoffrey Beene)
For men. This was a cult fragrance in the late 1970s. A beautiful scent. (200ml, £29.99)

Pure Black (Bugatti)
It's a fresh, spicy, chypre scent for men with something leathery as it dries out. There's aromatic freshness and vibrant spices. (30ml eau de toilette, £32)

Noix de Tubéreuse (Miller Harris)
Heady scent in solid balm form, in the dinkiest little box. (5g, £33.20)

Aroma D'Orange Verte (Hermès)
A lively cologne. It's meant to be for men. (50ml eau de cologne, £28.50)

Grigio Perla (La Perla)
For men. Very nice, very elegant. Classic fougère. A refined scent. (50ml eau de toilette, £28)



Elegant: Grigio Perla by La Perla

'When people phone up and use Lenny's name, I feel a sudden gulp of joy'

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institutions. Elise is a member of the syndicate that owns the violin Matthew plays — a 1711 Stradivarius worth £1 million. She immediately opened her contacts book to them. "We had no idea what we were doing at first," says Matthew. "It was really the kindness of friends that got us up and running."

The foundation will initially raise money for the under-equipped neonatal intensive care unit at the Whittington. The Truslers refer to the consultant who oversaw Lenny's birth, Ed Broadhurst, as a "superhero": "At one point, early in the labour; it looked like there was no space for me at any London hospitals," says Maya. "We were going to have to go to Bournemouth. But Ed made space for us. He had incredible compassion." Already they have given the hospital £12,000 to kit out a family room for parents with sick babies.

Music is obviously a way of life for the Truslers. Maya plays with the London

Conchord Ensemble and Matthew's CV includes invitations to perform as a soloist with orchestras all over the world. Yet Lenny's brief life, they say, has given new meaning to theirs. "I grew up desperately wanting this career," says Matthew. "It's important to me. But Lenny has given everything perspective. The foundation is the reason for all of it now. It's the most important thing I've ever been a part of."

Of course, life went on. Matthew did "all the horrid stuff you have to when you lose a baby. You would think that you just go off and grieve — but no, your face kind of gets rubbed in it. You queue up with all these happy new parents and their babies to get the birth certificate; only you're getting the birth and death certificates at the same time."

When he and his mother bought a blanket to wrap Lenny in, the saleswoman congratulated him on his new baby, and told him how perfect the blanket would look. "My mother just

bundled me out of the shop... Then we had to design a badge for the coffin. It got quite morbid."

Maya, meanwhile, got a job playing with the Philharmonia three months after Lenny's birth. "We were playing a lot of Mahler, and one of the pieces was the Kindertotenlieder, which is about the death of children. So, yes, that was pretty upsetting."

At the same time, by accident, she became pregnant again — and at first regretted it. She was emotionally and physically shattered by the trauma of Lenny's birth, and found it hard to deal

with the stress of another pregnancy. "It was too quick. My brain wasn't ready. In a weird way I became convinced it was Lenny coming back again."

The Truslers were given monthly scans for their own peace of mind. "When I saw it was a girl, it came as a huge shock," says Maya. "It was only slowly that I started to realise that this was a different person."

Lily's birth, eight months ago, was hardly trouble-free. Born with the umbilical cord around her neck, she had to be revived by doctors, again at the Whittington. "She wasn't breathing," says Maya. "I remember feeling suddenly numb. I thought: 'It's happening again and I don't want anything to do with this baby!' Then there was a kind of blank. I've erased the first minutes of her life; they are completely gone."

"It was the most frightening moment of my life," adds Matthew, cradling Lily and shaking his head. "There were six people around her, slapping her and

shouting: 'Come on, baby!' They put a mask on her; and you just think: 'Oh God, this has to be how it happens...'

But Lily did breathe, and cry — and was soon lying in Maya's arms, a compact 7lb of perfect little girl. The couple admit that they are paranoid parents. "I look at her every day and I can't believe she's still here," says Maya grimly. "I do realise every day what Lenny missed. Looking at Lily, I think about what he might have been like and realise that he didn't have a proper life at all. It seems so unfair."

"But that's what the foundation is for," replies Matthew, softly. "Sometimes when people phone up about it now and use his name, I feel a sudden gulp of joy. He is living on. We're giving him as much of a life as we can."

■ *Fairy Tales and Goblins Dancing, a concert in aid of the Lenny Trusler Children's Foundation, is at Kings Place on 18 December. To buy tickets for the concert or to donate to the charity visit www.lcf.co.uk.*

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