

Charges dropped against Chetham violin teacher accused of raping pupil

Wen Zhou Li reportedly told he could walk free ‘without a stain on his character’ three years after arrest

Helen Pidd *North of England editor*

Wed 30 Mar 2016 17.56 BST Last modified on Wed 29 Nov 2017 00.05 GMT



Chetham's School of Music, where Wen Zhou Li worked as a violin teacher. He was found not guilty after the prosecution formally offered no evidence against him. Photograph: Dave Thompson/PA

An acclaimed violin teacher accused of raping one of his teenage pupils at a prestigious music school in Manchester will not face trial after the prosecution against him was dropped.

Three years after being arrested on suspicion of sex crimes committed against a 13-year-old pupil at Chetham's School of Music, Wen Zhou Li was found not guilty after the prosecution formally offered no evidence against him. In a hearing on 18 March, the judge, Mr Justice Henshall, said Li could walk free “without a stain on his character”, according to his lawyers.

The move marks an end to a three-year investigation into sex abuse at Chetham's and the Royal Northern College of Music, triggered by the conviction of Michael Brewer, former head of music at Chetham's, in February 2013.

His victim, Frances Andrade, killed herself after giving evidence against him and did not see him found guilty of indecently assaulting her. After her suicide, dozens of former pupils contacted the Guardian to make allegations of sex abuse against other teachers at both schools, some still alive and others long dead.

Greater Manchester police (GMP) then began Operation Kiso, which eventually led to three further teachers being charged with sex crimes against students at the two music schools. In September 2014 conductor Nicholas Smith was sentenced to eight months in prison after admitting sexually assaulting a 15-year-old pupil in the 1970s.

Two months later, world-renowned double bassist Duncan McTier pleaded guilty to sexual assaults two counts of indecent assault and one count of attempted indecent assault against young women from the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) and Purcell school in Hertfordshire in the 1980s and 90s.

Last June Malcolm Layfield, former head of strings at the RNCM, was found not guilty of raping one of his charges, when she was 18.

In September the key suspect in Operation Kiso, violin teacher Chris Ling, killed himself when American law enforcement officials went to issue him with an extradition warrant at his home in Los Angeles.

Ling had been due to face 77 charges of sex offences against 10 former pupils at Chetham's when they were as young as nine, as well as a woman who cleaned his house as a teenager.

Speaking after the case against him was dropped, Li said he had never behaved inappropriately with any of his students during his decades-long career as a violin teacher, including the woman who went on to accuse him of rape.

But the 61-year-old said that when he joined Chetham's and the RNCM in the early 1990s that pupil-teacher relationships were common. The most notorious of all was Ling, he said, describing him as "evil".

Shanghai-born Li said he took over Ling's class at the RNCM shortly after Ling fled to the US with a group of sixth form students at Chetham's known

as “Ling’s Strings”, following an aborted investigation by GMP into Ling’s behaviour.

“He just overpowered them emotionally, like nobody’s business. He must have a gift for this, just like Hitler managed to overpower the whole of goddamn Germany,” Li said, adding that the pupils told him that Ling had made them take their clothes off if they played a wrong note. Li claimed he would have been prepared to testify against Ling had he lived to face trial in the UK. “I believed his complainants 100%,” he said.

But Li said he was not guilty of any abuse himself. He said the case against him was dropped when it emerged the complainant had made allegations against another music teacher in another country, but that no charges were ever brought. He also claimed that she came back to learn with him at the RNCM several years after the alleged abuse took place. “Why would she ask me to be her teacher again if I had raped her?” he said.

He was suspended by Chetham’s and the RNCM after his arrest, which he accepted was correct given the seriousness of the allegations. But he objected to his bail conditions, which prevented him from having unsupervised access to his sons, now aged eight and 12. Cheshire social services attempted to take the boys into care, he claimed.

Li now runs a supply chain management business between the UK and China and says he has no plans to return to teaching. “For two years after my arrest I couldn’t even listen to music. It was too painful,” he said.

Greater Manchester police said: “In September 2014, Wen Zhou Li was charged with rape and two offences of indecent assault. A decision has been made by the CPS to discontinue charges against Li. Greater Manchester police has not received any new information relating to this investigation.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/mar/30/charges-dropped-against-chetham-violin-teacher-accused-of-raping-pupil-wen-zhou-li>