

Sarisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 7TH MAY 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor! It's May already, how did that happen?! I hope you've had a good week. Mine has been eventful, but I'm not here to talk about that, I'm here to talk about music, so here goes. As always, comments, improvements, suggestions welcome.

Online singing opportunities

A quick reminder of the "come and sing online" led by Caius Lee (organ scholar at St. Catharine's college, Cambridge) this Saturday 9th May. Repertoire is Faure's Requiem plus a new work by Anthony Gray dedicated to those who need our prayers at this time.

<https://www.florenceisp.com/faurerequiem>

Another quick reminder to have a look at Richard Cooke's blog. The latest one focuses on the later works of Richard Strauss.

<http://www.richardcooke.org/blog.htm>

A continued reminder to strongly support Ben England's self-isolation choir, continues to work through learning Handel's Messiah, in preparation for a unique performance on Sunday 31st May. Even if you don't participate in the performance at the end of the month, this serves as excellent practice for the WCMF concert in 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpSJYwHv2Y8>

A final reminder to keep supporting Ben England's other YouTube channel, which has a wide variety of singing material to try out. Since last week, Ben has done a good video on the chorus of the Hebrew from Verdi's opera Nabucco.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CErP9JeE_Ww

Singing regularly

In a different vein this week, have a look at Roger Hale's YouTube videos on sight singing (a favourite subject for some!) See how you get on with these exercises!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-SqSXaIMr4>

Quiz answer

The Kyrie based on a famous classical piano piece which I invited you to identify last week is based on the Moonlight Sonata by Beethoven. Congratulations if you got it correct!

Beethoven 250

As 2020 marks 250 years since the birth of Ludwig van Beethoven, I'm continuing to have a



look at a couple more choral works by Beethoven, starting with the reason why a Kyrie based on the Moonlight Sonata came about in the first place.

In the 19th century, the idea of adding text to instrumental works was a common conception. Texts were added to Beethoven's instrumental works even during his lifetime. After Beethoven's death in 1827, a large number of published arrangements began to appear in existence. The setting of the Kyrie to the first movement of the Moonlight sonata is by Gottlob Benedict Bierey.

Bierey was born on 25th July 1772 in Dresden and was a pupil of the Kreuzkantor Christian Theodor Weinlig at the age of 13. He found employment as music director of various travelling theatres until 1808, when he was appointed Kapellmeister at the city theatre of Wrocław. In 1824, he took on the overall direction of the theatre. Bierey enjoyed an excellent reputation as a musician and director, but also suffered from "hostilities and intrigues" in Wrocław which affected his health and moved him to retire in 1828. From 1829 he stayed in Leipzig, Weimar, Wiesbaden and Mainz, returning to Wrocław in 1834, where he died on 5th May 1840.

As a composer, Bierey was mainly active for the theatre. He created about 30 operas, operettas and Singspiels. In addition, he wrote choruses and songs for stage plays, dramatic music, overtures, marches and dances, piano pieces, songs, chants, cantatas and a mass.

In 1831, the music publishers Breitkopf & Härtel published four Beethoven adaptations by Bierey, including a Kyrie after the first movement of the Moonlight Sonata. The recording I recommend uses the original piano accompaniment, but Bierey made both arrangements for orchestra accompaniment.

Have a listen and see what you think!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REccduKF6zo>

The other Ode to Joy

Rather than mention Beethoven's famous choral work (which reached number two in the Classic FM 2020 hall of fame) I'd like to introduce you (or reintroduce you) to the Choral Fantasia or Choral Fantasy, which is regarded as a forerunner to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

The work was composed by Beethoven in 1808 and it was to serve as the concluding work for the benefit concert he put on for himself on 22nd December of the same year. The performers in the concert consisted of vocal soloists, chorus, an orchestra, and Beethoven himself as piano soloist. The Fantasia was

designed to include all the participants in the programme and thus unites all of these musical forces.

The Choral Fantasy lasts about 20 minutes and is divided into two movements, which run into each other without a break. The work begins with an extended piano solo, before the orchestra joins in, to be later followed by the chorus and soloists. The text, of an unknown origin, talks of "universal fraternity with the meeting of arts" text along similar lines as "Ode to Joy".

Here's a good version on YouTube from the Proms:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJeYMuIi8LI>

New series!

In a new series, I have been in touch with various friends and colleagues who have been kind enough to be interviewed for our newsletters!



First up is 21-year-old Oliver Downer who is the Musical Director for Rising Stars Productions, The Gantry Youth Theatre, Romsey Ladies Choir and Winchester A Cappella. Ollie is also the Assistant Conductor for Southampton University Symphony Orchestra. Ollie teaches singing for Southampton Music Services, clarion for the National Open Youth Orchestra and teaches privately. He currently works as the Education Officer for the SÓN Orchestra as their Education Officer and is the Youth Ambassador on Southampton Music Hub's board.

Where did you study music?

I am currently finishing studying a BA in music at the University of Southampton.

Who are your greatest musical inspirations?

My greatest influence is Steve Reich. I find his approach to composition fascinating. I have just finished recording the Clarinet lines for New York Counterpoint, a piece in which you prerecord 10 clarinet parts and play the eleventh live. My favourite piece by him is Music for 18 Musicians.

As a conductor, in a performance your back is to the audience. Are you still able to feel a sense of communication with your listeners?

I feel communication to an audience through the performers in front of me. They perform differently depending on the reaction from an audience. That response is then transferred through them to the conductor. It is then the job of the conductor to read and understand those visual and aural cues from the performers and adjust their delivery accordingly.

How do you persuade your singers to engage with the audience?

The first step to being able to successfully engage with an audience is confidence in what you are singing. Once we are no longer worried about the accuracy of our part, we can turn our attention to the performance. I ensure that the ensemble is aware of the message we are trying to convey and the best way for us to do so. I encourage an authentic and relatable performance that an audience will be able to engage with.

Which choral pieces would you take to a desert island?

Sleep by Eric Whitacre and the Hunchback of Notre Dame Medley performed by Ringmasters.

How can we encourage people to join choirs and maintain membership?

We must recognise what choirs provide us beyond singing. We need to embrace the social and health benefits that singing with an ensemble has. It is the job of every member in an ensemble to welcome new members and connect with existing ones. The best thing about choirs is that every member already has something in common, their love for singing. This makes them such a brilliant platform for new friendships. Ultimately, if we like the people we are singing with, we will give a better performance so there is so many reasons to embrace the social side of singing!

Many thanks to Ollie for his time in answering my questions.
I'm sure you will join me in wishing him further success after he finishes University!

And finally!

This Saturday would have been the Romsey concert of the Winchester and County Music Festival. As the Festival isn't taking place this year, you might like to spend an evening this week, listening to Mozart's Mass in C minor, which was to be the second half of the concert. David Burgess, who was due to be conducting, recommends these two versions on YouTube:

Monteverdi Choir & English Baroque Soloists

<https://youtu.be/FYlvNlyhCbE>

Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo & Coro Acadêmico e Coro da Osesp

<https://youtu.be/oWWeL8YvS2q>

Enjoy your virtual concert and don't forget to have refreshments in the interval!

Have a good week, stay safe and stay singing!

Graham