

Sarisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 21ST MAY 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor! I hope you're continuing to keep well and I hope you're continuing to enjoy these newsletters. Comments, improvements, suggestions more than welcome.

Music online

It's been good to hear from a few of you that you have enjoyed some of the online singing opportunities that I've mentioned in previous newsletters. If you happen to come across any other online singing opportunities that I haven't mentioned, then do let me know so I can publicise it. I have recently found a new one that I know you'll all enjoy, but I'm deliberately saving it so I have content for future newsletters. Plus, it's nice to keep some surprises up your sleeve!



This week, Richard Cooke (conductor of the Royal Choral Society) has chosen to focus on Berlioz

in his blog and has particularly focused on his song cycle *Les Nuits D'Été*. I note that he mentions the *Grande Messe des Morts* which I wrote about in an earlier episode!

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

A few people have mentioned to me in social distanced conversations that they are really enjoying the great work that Ben England is doing during this period of lockdown. I have no idea how on earth he has the time to do all that he is doing!



Ben's "Home choir" channel continues to upload daily singing videos for you to get on with. As I said last week, I've only been pointing you in

home
choir.uk

the direction of the Quarantine Chorus videos which focus on music from our usual repertoire, but do use this period to try singing other styles, if you don't already. As Ben hasn't uploaded a new Quarantine Chorus video since last week, you might like to have a look at the "sacred sing" one.

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



Finally, please keep supporting the self-isolation choir channel, led by Ben England.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MNPnkXIVPc>

I was very impressed to see on Facebook how seriously Stephen Pember from the WCFC tenor section has been taking the Messiah rehearsals.



Wake up your ears aka the F word...

Roger Hale has uploaded a new video this week on intonation and pitching intervals correctly which is worth a look:



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

CBSO stay tuned



Following on from last week's focus on the online resources currently on offer

from the London Symphony Orchestra, this week I'd like to point you in the direction of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra:

<https://cbso.co.uk/cbsostaytuned>

There are so many resources here that I'm not even going to try and do this justice here, except to say go and discover! I will just point out a few things that might interest you over the next few weeks.

Members of the CBSO Chorus have contributed to a lockdown performance of "Somewhere over the rainbow" ...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yk9WUG8bY8I>

... and you might be interested to watch members of the CBSO Chorus in conversation about Faure's Requiem and other things:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MO2iD-Rd1yw>

Pieces of the week

As churches this week remember the Ascension of Jesus into heaven, I've decided to write about a motet called "Coelos ascendit hodie" which is one of a set of three motets composed in 1905 by the Irish composer Charles Villiers Stanford (1852 - 1924).



This anthem is a setting of an Ascension hymn dating from the 14th century and is written for eight part choir (SSAATTBB). Stanford writes the music so the eight parts are set

out as two choirs (SATB + SATB) and listen out for the effects that Stanford is able to create with this idea e.g. one choir interrupting the other by singing Alleluia at them, then switching over! This is another one that won't take you long to listen to, coming in at just over two minutes!

Here's a helpful recording of the work complete with score.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8maeFdlpyvw>

I'd like to also mention a choral work that I expect nearly none of you have encountered called the "Ascension Jazzmass" by Rod Paton.



A link to a biography of Rod is here:

<https://naturalvoice.net/practitioner/rodpaton>

This piece was composed between 1988 and 1990 and is written for female vocalist, 4-part choir, nine-piece jazz ensemble and organ plus (wait for it), 21 marimba-style xylophones. I heard this work in 2000 and twenty years later it's still stuck in my head! Alas, there are no recordings or videos available online so I can share it with you.

More about the use of jazz in sacred music (especially masses) next week.

Special guest!



We travel to Herefordshire this week, to hear from **Simon Harper** who is the Music Director of Hereford Chamber Choir, the Cotswolds-based Cantores Chamber Choir, and Ledbury Choral Society. Simon is also a tenor lay clerk at Hereford Cathedral and has a busy private teaching practice.

Where did you study music?

"I studied music at the University of York - a great department with lots of opportunities for performance, choral singing, opera, conducting, and specialising in early and new music".

Who are your greatest musical inspirations?

"I feel incredibly lucky to have been brought up in a very musical family - both my parents are singers, and my mother is an excellent pianist. My two sisters and I were encouraged to sing and learn instruments (for me, the violin) from an early age. I also had many wonderful inspirational music teachers who instilled in me a great love of classical music. After graduating from university, I was privileged to be accepted onto the Genesis Sixteen scheme, run by Harry Christophers and Eamonn Dougan of The Sixteen. I learnt so much from working with such inspirational choral directors, not just about singing but also about choral conducting".

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?

"Yes, definitely - obviously it is the singers in the choir who directly communicate with the audience, but they take their lead and inspiration from the conductor whose job it is to shape and

mould the musical performance. Even though silent, the conductor is often the focal point of the performance so, by watching his or her direction of the choir and interpretation of the music, the audience's perception of the music can be truly enhanced. Conductors are sometimes described as 'messengers for composers' - their job is to convey their understanding of the music to the performers, through gesture, which is then transmitted to the audience".

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

"I encourage singers to think of three points of a triangle when performing - the music, the conductor, and the audience. The members of the audience are paying not only to hear the music, but also to see it performed - if the performers do not look up and engage with those watching, the audience may as well have stayed at home and put on a CD of the music! Of course, looking up and out to the audience also improves projection of the sound when singing".

Which choral pieces would you take to a desert island?

"This is the most difficult question... there's just too many wonderful pieces of music to choose from! Definitely some Bach - probably the Mass in B minor, or the Christmas Oratorio which is my favourite to sing as a member of the choir (there are some great tenor moments!) I also love Renaissance polyphony - if I had to pick a single piece it would be William Byrd's O Lord, make thy servant Elizabeth our Queen. Maybe something more Romantic too - Brahms Geistliches Lied or Rheinberger's sumptuous Abendlied. One of my favourite choral works is Herbert Howells' deeply moving setting of the Requiem. I also love the music of William Walton - especially his astounding choral work Belshazzar's Feast, and his sublime a cappella setting of John Masefield's poem Where does the uttered music go?"

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

"It is a well-known saying that we often do not realise how much we love or value something until it is taken away. I think it takes something like the lockdown we are currently in for people truly to realise the benefits of singing with other people - for physical and mental health, opportunities for social interaction, to build confidence, learn new skills, work as a team, be inspired by amazing music, and be part of incredible performances. We have to keep preaching about these things and how singing in a choir can really improve one's lifestyle".



Many thanks to Simon for his time in answering my questions. Maybe we could do a joint collaboration with his three choirs one day.

Simon was due to give a song recital last Friday, in aid of the Friends of Hereford Chamber Choir. This was obviously postponed, but to compensate, here he is singing a short song by John Ireland, accompanied on the piano by his wife Kate: <https://www.facebook.com/787349321357418/videos/257684258763514/>

You might like to have a look at the very swanky website of his Cantores chamber choir. I recommend having a listen to the recording on the website of the choir singing William Byrd's setting of the Ave verum: <https://www.cantores.net/>

That's all for this week folks. Stay safe and keep singing!

Graham