

Salisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 11TH JUNE 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor!

Thank you to all those of you who have sent me feedback about the newsletters.

A few of you have apologised that you haven't managed to look at all of the links.

No apologies needed! Feel free to dip in and out of the links as much as you want.

A quick reminder about the other newsletter that I have been producing for my church choir, which is along the same format of these ones. If you'd like to have a look at them, they are available on the Church website here: <http://stfaith.com/566-2/>

So to this week's newsletter... and as ever, comments, feedback, suggestions are more than welcome!

Online singing opportunities

home
choir.uk

After a well-deserved week off, Ben England is back to uploading daily singing videos on the "Home choir" YouTube channel. As usual, lots of videos to sing along to in a range of styles. Here is his video from last Sunday, with a theme of spirituals:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXhQCLQDE1E>

Ben's self-isolation choir project is currently on a break until 22nd June, when the first week of their virtual summer school takes place. Full details are available on their website:

<https://www.theseisolationchoir.com/summer-school-2020>



Elsewhere, the "stay at home" choir have a couple of projects on the go at the moment. You can join in with a performance of movements from Adiemus by Karl Jenkins and an upcoming performance of extracts from Karl Jenkins' "The Armed Man". Further details here:

<https://new.stayathomechoir.com/projects>

As I type this, I'm listening to a very helpful teaching video by Tori Longdon for the Adiemus project.

For previous "stay at home" choir projects, here's their video in collaboration with the King's Singers of Bob Chilcott's excellent arrangement of "And so it goes" by Billy Joel (have a box of tissues nearby if you get emotional easily):

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

The musicians of St. Edmundsbury Cathedral in Suffolk are running a virtual come and sing of Faure Requiem on Friday 12th June at 5pm. No need to use Zoom, or record yourself, or video yourself for this one, you just need to tune in to YouTube and sing along!



<https://stedscathedral.org/faures-requiem-come-and-sing/>



Finally, for this section, Roger Hale has been busy since last week and put together a voice workshop video plus answering some vocal questions. Maybe let the neighbours know beforehand that you're watching this in case they wonder what the noises are:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueoapBi4j-U>


Music online

Whilst browsing through the internet the other day, I stumbled across the videos of concerts by the Royal Academy of Music who, rather like other orchestras that I've mentioned previously, are offering videos of previous performances. Here is their performance of Puccini's *Messa di Gloria* from October 2015, conducted by Michael Rosewell who is director of Opera at the Royal College:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0W510wAIsAA>

I'll point you in the direction of some of their other videos in future newsletters.

 On Sunday 14th June at 7pm, the London Symphony Orchestra continue their broadcasts of previous concerts, with a performance of incidental music by Mendelssohn for a production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream". The choir on this occasion are the Monteverdi choir and the concert is conducted by John Eliot Gardiner:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/Lso/videos>

Don't forget, if you want to watch any of the LSO videos, they are only available for 48 hours after the broadcast time and date.


The choir and instrumental **ARMONICO** ensemble known as the **CONSORT** Armonico Consort have uploaded a couple of really interesting interviews on their YouTube channel.

Here is one from baritone Roderick Williams...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vctk81cCxHA>

... and another from composer John Rutter:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kd4X_I9O6Pk

 Finally, here's a brand new video uploaded today from the Vasari Singers conducted by Jeremy Backhouse. On this video, they are singing a piece called "I am the voice of the wind" by the British composer Gabriel Jackson. This piece was commissioned by one of the altos in the Vasari Singers in memory of their daughter Geraldine who died at the early age of 24. The words are a poem called "The spirit" and were written by Geraldine herself when she was 13.

The soprano soloist on this video is Jocelyn Coe. Many of you will know her better as Jocelyn Somerville who is a regular soloist for our concerts.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTfcysFdfb8>

This is another video where it will be handy to have a box of tissues nearby (*even the editor nearly willed up!*) This is a video that you really need to watch and not just have on in the background.

I hope you like it as much as I did! Here's a link to the first three pages of the score:

<http://fdslive.oup.com/www.oup.com/academic/pdf/13/9780193378490.pdf>

Special guest!



This week's interviewee is an unusual one as it's someone who I've never met! When I was at University, I sang with Lexden Choral Society who were then conducted by Sarah Blake. Our special guest this week is the current conductor, John Chillingworth. John is also conductor of the newly formed Essex Youth Choir and Youth Vocal Ensemble for young singers aged from 14 to 19. As you'll see, John has put a lot of time and thought into answering my questions, so this is the first part of his interview, with part two following next week.

Where did you study music?

"I was very fortunate when I was young living in a small Irish town, that by chance there was a very fine organist teaching music in the same school as my father, and running local choirs and amateur musical groups. He started me off on the piano and organ and I'm not sure if I would have had the career I have, had he not been there at the right time for me. I studied at the Royal College of Music (jointly cello and organ) and later carried on having cello lessons with William Pleeth, who taught Jacqueline du Pre. I learned most of what I feel formed my musical background through studying chamber music with some wonderful musicians around the world including the Amadeus String Quartet and members of the Hungarian String Quartet. I was incredibly fortunate to have those opportunities; seeing them at work made me realise that for them, music was not just notes on a page, or about a particular piece, but when you studied and learned a piece, you approached it from every angle and incorporated all of life into your study. They talked about philosophy, history, the composer's life, the particular circumstances surrounding the piece's composition and your interpretation was not just looking at a few dots and words on a page but something much deeper. Their performances reflected this depth and could penetrate to the depths of your soul. I have always tried to follow this model, but sadly, the pace of life and earning a living as an orchestral musician (I was Principal Cellist at English National Opera for 25 years) did not leave enough time to get to their level of exploration. I try with Lexden Choral Society, to give them insights into the music beyond just learning the notes and to encourage them to sing with a total commitment to the music and especially its emotions".

Who are your greatest musical inspirations?

"This is such a difficult question. There are so many in so many different areas of music. As I already mentioned in the answer above, the four members of the Amadeus Quartet, Hungarian Quartet, William Pleeth, George Hurst, with whom I studied conducting, Paul Tortelier, the wonderful viola player Cecil Aronowitz, Daniel Barenboim, Ann Murray for her singing of Handel, Sarah Connelly, Herbert von Karajan for the extraordinary sound he could draw from an orchestra, Bernard Haitink, the exemplary model of a conductor who leads but always in collaboration, Oscar Peterson. I could go on but as you can see, I find inspiration in many areas of music. One of the most inspiring evenings of music I had in my life was seeing (twice) the National Theatre production of "Anything Goes"."

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 think that is easier to achieve with a choir than with an orchestra. When I rehearse with a choir, a lot of my attention is on their communication with the audience, their delivery of the words and the meaning of those words, the varying degree of intensity in the musical phrases and trying to encourage the choir to take the audience on a journey with them so the audience feels what they want them to feel about the music. In performance, of course I want them to navigate their way safely from beginning to end of whatever work they are performing, but more than that, I want them to express the full range of emotion and passion in the music they are singing. I encourage them to sing to particular audience members; there are moments in certain pieces when the audience should feel uncomfortable. Not all

music is "nice" and if it is about being cast into a bottomless pit for all eternity, or thrown into a lion's mouth, the singers should meet the audience head on and nail them with searing passion. Conversely, if they are singing about being bathed in the warmth of eternal light, then the audience should bask in that warmth, like a cat stretching out on a hot terrace in the sun. With an orchestra, that is more difficult as their attention tends to be more inward, concentrating on ensemble and listening to each other. However, whether singing or playing, projection of sound and feeling is vital to give the audience a satisfying experience".

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

"Well I suppose I spoke about that in the last question but there are a number of age old strategies for choirs. Singing from memory is great as it frees performers from the barrier of the printed copy and leaves them able to totally immerse themselves in the emotional power of their music. If copies are necessary, which they are for most choirs, then holding the copies up so they are looking out directly into the auditorium. Conductors like to think it is so the performers will look at them but the audience is the most important. Using eye contact is very important; the great performers manage to make every member of the audience feel like the performer was singing or playing just for them so looking, with eyes wide open, to the back of the auditorium is a good strategy. And, the best of all, smiling while you sing and looking like you are enjoying giving the performance, even if you are terrified. If the audience think you are enjoying the music, they will probably enjoy it too".

Many thanks to John for answering my questions. We continue our chat next time!

In the meantime, here is the website for Lexden Choral Society: <http://www.lexdenchoral.org/>

In 2013, the founder of Lexden Choral Society, Sarah Blake was interviewed by the local press. You can still read her very interesting interview here:



<https://www.gazette-news.co.uk/news/10388481.i-come-alive-when-i-am-conducting-in-front-of-a-big-crowd/>

Virtual summer school

During June, I'll be sending you a link to a score of a short piece to have a go at! The aim is to have a "come and sing" in the style of the event organised by St. Edmundsbury Cathedral on page 2 of this newsletter. So you don't need to record yourself, just learn the notes and be ready to sing along on **Wednesday 8th July!** I've chosen folksong arrangements from the British Isles and we'll work our way around the country as we go. This week, we go to Ireland with the folksong "Our wedding day", which is also known as "She moved through the fair".

The link to the score is here: <http://www.adrianoseccomusic.it/arrang/SATB/ourweddingday.pdf>

The link to a "synth audio" recording is here:

http://www.adrianoseccomusic.it/arrang/arrang_audio/ourwedding.mp3

For the benefit of the "performance", don't worry about the pauses or rit.

As last week, I have put together learning files, which are available on the members only section of the choir website. I hope you enjoy learning it!

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

Graham